
A HISTORY OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN CUBA

Robert J. Alexander

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To Lyndsey Erin Alexander

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Preface

This is the first of a planned series of volumes on the history of organized labor in Latin America and the Caribbean. These deal with a subject that more than half a century ago first caused me to become interested in the societies, economics, and politics of the nations that make up the Western Hemisphere south of the United States.

My attention first focused on Latin American organized labor when I took a course in Latin American History from Professor Frank Tannenbaum at Columbia University in the late 1930s. I wrote a term paper for Professor Tannenbaum on the history of Argentine labor movement. When I completed this study, which totaled something more than 100 pages, I made the surprising (and not unpleasant) discovery that I was an "expert" on the subject—for the simple reason that it appeared that no one else in this country—except a real expert in the U.S. Department of Labor—knew anything about it.

I continued to look into the labor movements of Latin America by writing my M.A. thesis on the history of Chilean organized labor. Then, after an "extended vacation" from concentration on intellectual matters while spending three and a half years in the United States Army Air Force during World War II, I returned to the subject by writing my Ph.D. dissertation on labor relations in Chile. To collect material for that work, I made my first extended trip to Latin America in 1946–1947, spending half of that year in Chile, and first visiting Cuba on the way home.

Subsequently, during my early years as a member of the Economics faculty of Rutgers University, I had the good fortune of having an association with two people who greatly facilitated my

continuing and developing study of Latin America, and particularly of the Latin American labor movements. These were Serafino Romualdi, the Latin American representative of the American Federation of Labor (and subsequently of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL-CIO]), and Jay Lovestone, who was for many years the virtual "foreign minister" of the AFL and then of the AFL-CIO.

Mr. Romualdi engaged my part-time services to help him edit the English-language periodical of the Interamerican Confederation of Workers (CIT), and then that of the Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT). Mr. Lovestone employed me on a number of occasions during the Rutgers vacation periods to travel to various parts of Latin America to report to him what I observed there about the trade union situation (as well as general economic and political conditions) in the countries that I visited. With the help of these two gentlemen I was able to expand and intensify my firsthand acquaintanceship with the labor movements of Latin America and the Caribbean. Subsequently, for several additional decades, I continued to visit Latin America and the Caribbean and to maintain and broaden my study of the subject.

In traveling more or less frequently to Latin America and the Caribbean, renewing and expanding my contacts with organized labor in the nations, I kept extensive notes on conversations I had with union leaders, politicians, and others who could shed light on the labor movement, as well as comments on particular situations that I was able to observe. These notes and comments have provided an important part of the material that appears in this book. So do trade union related documents that I collected on my visits.

Of course, I am obliged to many people who had made it possible for this book to be written and published. To start with, I owe much to the many people who, over the years, talked with me and told me about details of the history of Cuban organized labor with which they were acquainted or in which they had participated. The names of many of these can be found in the chapter notes and Bibliography.

I am much obliged to Dr. Efrén Córdova, who himself has chronicled the story of Cuban organized labor and who was kind enough to read parts of the manuscript of this book, and to give me a worthwhile critique of them. Of course, he bears no responsibility for any errors of fact or judgment that appear in these pages. That responsibility is only mine.

I also owe much to my friend and former student, Eldon Parker, who has put the manuscript into camera-ready condition, and has done invaluable work in proofreading it, and helping in

various other ways to get the book through the production process.

I likewise owe much to people in Greenwood Publishing who were instrumental in bringing this book to print. As has frequently been the case in the past, I must thank Dr. James Sabin, who decided that this work was worthy of publication. I must also thank Susan Thornton for copyediting and Lynn Zelem who otherwise pushed forward the process of converting a manuscript into a published book.

Finally, I am as always indebted to my wife, Joan, who bore with me while I worked on this book instead of doing other things that she might have thought more worthwhile.

Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ

Organized Labor in the Colonial Period and Early Republic

Cuba, together with Puerto Rico, were the last parts of the American empire to be lost by Spain. Cuba did not fall until what the Cubans call the Cuban-Spanish-American War of 1898.

During almost all of the nineteenth century, the Spaniards continued to rule in the island. During that period, the Cuban economy began to center particularly on the production and export of sugar and tobacco. In the last decades of the century, investments, particularly in sugar, by United States citizens and companies increasingly challenged Spanish control of the Cuban economy.

The labor force, particularly in the sugar industry, continued until very late in the nineteenth century to be made up to a large degree of black slaves from Africa. Although the Cuban First Republic declared the emancipation of the slaves in 1868, not until 1886 did slavery effectively end. Cuba was the next to last American country to abolish slavery. So long as slavery existed, it greatly hampered the development of an organized labor movement.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Cuban politics began to become a reality. Political opinion was divided among three groups. There were those who supported the continuation of Cuba as a Spanish colony; those who, without breaking the ties with the "mother country," sought the establishment of an autonomous regime on the island; and those who advocated establishment of a Cuban republic, independent of Spain. The Spanish government did little to placate those who held the latter two points of view.

The upshot of the situation was the outbreak in 1868 of the Ten Years War, the island's first struggle for independence. Under

the leadership of a landowner on the eastern part of the island, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the First Cuban Republic was proclaimed, and for some time the rebels controlled much of the eastern half of the island. It took a decade for the Spanish authorities to defeat the rebels.

However, the military defeat of the republic did not end the struggle against the colonial rule that Spain had exercised over the island for almost four centuries. Finally, the Liberal Party government, which came to power in Spain in 1897, recognized this fact. That administration negotiated with the Autonomist parties in both Cuba and Puerto Rico and early in 1898 established more or less elected autonomous regimes in both islands.

However, in Cuba it was too late. The military struggle for re-establishment of the Cuban Republic had been resumed. This time, the spark plug of the independence forces was José Martí. After more than a decade of organizing the independentist forces from exile, and of traveling throughout the Western Hemisphere arguing the cause of the Cuban Republic, he had succeeded in launching a second war of independence in 1895. Although Martí was killed early in the struggle, the war went on.

The Second Cuban War of Independence aroused much attention and sympathy in the United States. There had always been those North Americans who felt that "manifest destiny" dictated that Cuba become part of the United States, and there were by 1898 those who felt that the Cuban revolutionary war presented the chance of that destiny's being fulfilled. There were by that time, too, important United States economic interests in the sugar industry and elsewhere that welcomed the chance to "free" Cuba from Spanish rule. Finally, there were some idealistic sympathizers with the Cuban struggle for independence, whose number was greatly augmented by the vivid descriptions by an important part of the United States press of the bravery of the rebels and the cruelty of the Spanish "oppressors."

The United States became involved in the struggle in Cuba as the result of the explosion in the Havana harbor of the U.S. battleship *Maine*, the exact cause of which remained a mystery a century after it occurred. However, whatever the cause, the government of President William McKinley took the incident as a *casus belli*, and war was soon declared on Spain by the United States Congress. After a conflict lasting about three months, the United States forces controlled not only Cuba, but also Puerto Rico, as well as the Philippine Islands and Guam, Spanish possessions in the Pacific Ocean.

For four years after the United States occupation, Cuba was under U.S. military government. The United States Congress re-

fused to end that regime until the Cuban assembly, which was writing a constitution for the Republic of Cuba, would adopt the Platt Amendment, which provided for the right of the United States government

to intervene for the conservation of the independence of Cuba, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of lives, property and individual liberty and to fulfill the obligations which with respect to Cuba have been imposed upon the United States by the Treaty of Peace and which now must be assumed and fulfilled by the Government of Cuba.¹

Of course, the treaty of peace had been signed by the United States and Spain, with no participation by the Cubans.

In 1902 the Republic of Cuba was formally launched, with Tomás Estrada Palma, a man who had lived for many years in the United States, as its first president. During the first U.S. military occupation of Cuba and the Estrada Palma administration the trade union movement began to take shape.

As the end of his administration approached, it became evident that Estrada Palma wanted to have a second four-year term. However, this aroused great opposition, and even armed revolt. That situation was used as justification of a second military occupation of Cuba by the United States under the terms of the Platt Amendment, which lasted from 1906 to 1909.

This second occupation ended in 1909, when General José Miguel Gómez, a Liberal, was elected president. He was succeeded by General Mario García Menocal, a Conservative, who remained in office until 1921. Neither Gómez nor García Menocal was favorably disposed toward the existing labor movement.

During the nearly two decades of the Cuban Republic, the Cuban economy became overwhelmingly concentrated on the production and export of sugar. United States companies invested heavily in that industry, as did Cuban landowners. During World War I the sugar industry grew particularly rapidly, to provide the sugar needed by both the United States and Allied Europe, which had been to a large degree cut off from other sources of supply by the war. This boom came to a sudden end in 1920, and Cuban sugar suffered from an economic crisis that lasted for more than a decade and a half.

One effect of this crisis was that a large proportion of Cuban sugar producers lost control of their estates. Having borrowed very heavily from the foreign banks—American, Canadian, and Spanish, among others—that made up most of the financial sector to expand their operations during the war, producers were

unable to repay these loans after 1920 and lost their properties to the banks. The banks held them until World War II, which generated another sugar boom and allowed Cuban companies and individuals to purchase the sugar properties from the foreign financial institutions.

Meanwhile, the United States government had intervened once again in Cuban political life, sending General Enoch Crowder to Havana virtually to establish a protectorate regime, in which he in effect gave orders to President Menocal, and his successor, President Alfredo Zayas. This was precipitated by growing opposition to Menocal and the spread of massive corruption and what was seen from Washington as a growing financial crisis.

At the end of Zayas's administration, General Gerardo Machado was elected. Although at first he enjoyed substantial popular support, he was no friend of organized labor. As minister of interior under President Gómez he had treated the labor movement very arbitrarily. On becoming president, he made it known that no strike would be allowed to last more than twenty-four hours.²

During his more than eight years in the presidency, Gerardo Machado established one of the worst dictatorships under which Cuba suffered in the twentieth century. He altered the constitution to permit his staying in office after his term ended. He established a fearsome secret police force that jailed, tortured, and murdered people, extending its range of killings not only throughout Cuba but also into several neighboring countries. Among its victims were many leaders of organized labor.

Finally, in August 1933, President Machado was overthrown by the country's first successful military coup. This occurred while the dictator was faced with an almost universal general strike, which he unsuccessfully tried to halt by making a deal with the Communist leadership of the Confederación Obrera Nacional de Cuba (CNOC); and the coup was encouraged, if not engineered, by the United States ambassador, Sumner Welles.

Welles installed a new "safe" conservative administration headed by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, grandson of the president of the First Cuban Republic of 1868-1878. However, that short-lived regime was itself overthrown by an insurrection of army enlisted men led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista and university students. They installed a provisional government headed by Professor Ramón Grau San Martín of the University of Havana Medical School, which consisted in large part of university students and recently graduated alumni. This first Grau San Martín government was nationalist and socially oriented, with wide popular support, including that of much of the labor movement.

However, the Grau San Martín regime had two powerful enemies—the Communist Party and the United States government. The first sought to launch its own rural revolution, and the latter—at the urging of Ambassador Welles and his successor, Jefferson Caffery—convinced the State Department not to grant diplomatic recognition to the Grau administration. Finally, Caffery convinced the former Sergeant—by then Colonel—Batista to oust Grau and put in his place an old-style Cuban politician, Colonel Carlos Mendieta.

There was widespread popular opposition—particularly from the labor movement—to the Mendieta regime. This culminated in a revolutionary general strike in March 1935, which was put down with extreme brutality. For a couple of years, the regime—run from behind the scenes by Colonel Batista—was very oppressive and sought all but to destroy the labor movement.

However, in 1937 Colonel Batista began to modify his regime. He reached an agreement with the Communists and the remains of the CNOC leadership whereby he allowed the reorganization of the labor movement under predominantly Communist direction and the legal recognition of the Communist Party and began to make arrangements for the election of a new constitutional assembly.

As a result of this agreement, in January 1939, a congress was held that established a new central labor organization, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), which soon included virtually all of a greatly expanded labor movement within its ranks. Later that year, elections were held for a constituent assembly, which fashioned what came to be seen as one of the most progressive constitutions in Latin America, that of 1940.

Later that year Colonel Batista was elected president. He presided over a democratic regime, which in 1944 held honest elections that were won by the opposition presidential candidate, Ramón Grau San Martín. Although Grau's election was at first greeted with much euphoria by a large part of the population, disillusionment quickly followed. Not only did it fail to carry out most of the program of social and economic change on which it had been elected, but it evidenced a degree of corruption hitherto unmatched in Cuban history. From the point of view of the labor movement, it was most important because it saw the substitution of control over organized labor by President Grau's own party, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico), popularly called the Auténticos, for that of the Communists.

President Grau was succeeded in 1948 by President Carlos Prío Socarrás, also an Auténtico. Although Prío's government was also characterized by substantial corruption, it did carry out

much of the Auténtico program, establishing a Cuban central bank and a Bank of Agricultural and Industrial Development, as well as setting up the Tribunal de Cuentas, provided for in the Constitution of 1940 and designed to keep track of government expenditures to prevent corruption.

The Auténticos might well have won a third term in elections scheduled for June 1952. But those elections were never held. On March 10, General Batista engineered a military coup that ousted President Prío—who offered little resistance—and installed the general as Cuban chief executive once again. He engineered and managed presidential and parliamentary elections in 1954 that he won when Ramón Grau San Martín, his only opponent, withdrew a few days before the election, charging that its results had been rigged.

During the second Batista dictatorship, organized labor suffered a catastrophic crisis. At first trying to launch a general strike against Batista's coup of March 10, 1952, the Auténtico leaders of the CTC quickly made a deal with General Batista, feeling that that was the only way of preserving the labor movement. However, as time went on, the top CTC leadership, headed by Eusebio Mujal, became, objectively at least, one of Batista's most important supporters, leading subsequently to their complete discrediting.

The opponents of the Batista dictatorship were divided into four groups, insofar as strategy to overthrow the dictatorship was concerned. One, headed by the former President Grau San Martín, sought to repeat the 1944 experience and defeat him at the polls. A second, led by former President Prío, attempted to engineer a military coup against him. A third element, based on the university students' organization, the Directorio Revolucionario, relied on terror, including a major attempt to kill the tyrant.

The fourth group of opponents of Batista sought to organize a guerrilla war against the dictatorship. The most prominent—and successful—of those supporting this strategy was Fidel Castro, whose 26th of July Movement in November 1956 launched such a guerrilla effort—to be followed soon by smaller contingents of people of the Directorio Revolucionario and some ex-followers of President Prío, in separate guerrilla forces. This strategy finally proved successful on January 1, 1959, when, after a major military defeat, Batista fled into exile.

The first months of the regime dominated by Fidel Castro and the 26th of July were in a real sense transitional. It was not clear—perhaps not even to Castro himself—in what direction the new leaders wished to take Cuba. In that period, the 26th of July

more or less completely dominated organized labor, and demonstrated to a large degree the uncertainty of direction of the regime.

However, by the last months of 1959, Fidel Castro and the principal figures in the regime had determined that they were going to lead the Cuban Revolution in a Marxist-Leninist direction. Obviously, this had grave repercussions in the labor movement, which eventually resembled those of other Communist-led regimes.

ANTECEDENTS OF CUBAN ORGANIZED LABOR

Mario Riera Hernández professed to see as a forerunner of the modern labor movement in Cuba a strike in 1574 of stonecutters employed in building a military fortification that was resolved by granting the workers involved an increase in pay and a reduction of working hours.³ However, there was in fact no permanent organization that resulted from this incident; nor did it in any other way leave any traces in subsequent Cuban history. Three centuries would pass before the beginnings of a modern labor movement.

Until very late in Cuban colonial history, slavery remained a major impediment to the establishment of any kind of labor organization. Although there were undoubtedly from time to time isolated slave rebellions, the slave system did not have room for any organization of the enslaved workers for the purpose of ameliorating their lot.⁴

Among the island's free workers, the Spaniards attempted to establish *corporaciones* or *gremios*, organizations similar to the guilds that had existed in medieval Spain and continued in that country for several centuries thereafter. These groups, of course, were made up of masters, journeymen, and apprentices, dominated by the first of these groups. According to Efrén Córdova, there did not develop in Cuba any kind of specific journeymen's groups that could be precursors of a modern labor movement such as those that emerged in France. Indeed, the only possible connection of the *corporaciones* with the emergence of the labor movement was the support that a few of them gave to the establishment of mutual benefit societies in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁵

As in most of the rest of Latin America, it was the mutual benefit societies, and what Córdova called the "artisans' societies," that were, at least in some cases, the direct antecedents of trade unions. Córdova distinguishes between the mutual benefit societies, which were made up of workers in various trades, and the artisans' societies, consisting of workers who had a particular specialty. These began to appear in some numbers between 1848

and 1850. Both kinds of organizations were principally concerned with providing financial help to their members in case of sickness and aid to families on the death of breadwinners. Some also took an interest in establishing cooperatives.

Córdova notes:

Even more interesting was the fact that along with the classic purposes of protecting the members, there began to appear in some artisans' societies and those of mutual benefit, the purpose of defending the group. This was not yet expressed in a militant form or too explicitly, but the fact that some of these societies were in fact transforming themselves in practice into *resistance societies* pointed to another form of evolution in the direction of trade unionism.⁶

THE BEGINNING OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

At the end of 1865 the first labor newspaper in Cuba, *La Aurora*, was established by Saturnino Martínez. He was a Spanish worker from Asturias, who had had some contact with the labor movement already in existence in his homeland and had worked for a number of years in the tobacco industry in Havana.

La Aurora circulated particularly among the tobacco workers. It published information about the bad working conditions of those employed in that industry, as well as in some others. It also emphasized Saturnino Martínez's belief that one of the things that the workers needed to improve their situation was education. The paper argued strongly for the establishment by the workers of schools in which they and their children could become literate and acquire other kinds of knowledge.

Martínez also advocated strongly something that was to become common in the Cuban tobacco industry where newspapers, books, and magazines were read to the workers. Although the Spanish government in Cuba at first allowed the practice of reading in the tobacco shops, in 1867 it outlawed it on the grounds that the workers were being imbued with "subversive" ideas. Subsequently, however, the regime allowed the renewal of the practice.

A close associate of Saturnino Martínez was José de Jesús Márquez, a Cuban who had lived for a number of years in the United States and had returned home with new ideas. He was particularly strong in his adherence to the notion that the workers should establish cooperatives, particularly consumers' cooperatives. These ideas were circulated through *La Aurora*.

Labor journalism was not the only interest of Saturnino Martínez. In August 1865 there had occurred spontaneous strikes in the important tobacco enterprises in Havana. After these, Martínez undertook the leadership in the formation of what Efrén

Córdova calls "the first Cuban trade union," the Asociación [or Gremio] de Tabaqueros de La Habana, established in June 1866. The association presented demands to a number of the employing firms in the tobacco industry, and although it lasted only six months as a result of disputes within its membership, it set what became a pattern for Cuban labor organizations. It conducted a number of strikes, during which employers used the ranks of a dissident group, the Unión Obrera, to provide strikebreakers.⁷

Carlos del Toro has written that

at the beginning of the Ten Years War . . . the organization of the Cuban proletariat was fragmented in diverse mutualist, cooperative and craft organizations of ephemeral existence or which fought to survive under difficult conditions, especially in the tobacco industry. Where they appeared, they were oriented to improvements of a moral, economic and hygienic nature. The regime of slavery weighed heavily on the process of development and increase of the Cuban working class.⁸

The first Cuban war of independence, the Ten Years War (1868-1878), served to curb the first growth of trade unionism. The Spanish colonial government adopted draconian measures against "treason," evidence of which included "coalition of laborers or workers and leagues."⁹ Although there were walkouts during those years, particularly in 1872 and 1876, among tobacco workers, shoemakers, coach drivers, and other groups of workers, these were severely repressed, and numerous strikers were jailed by the authorities.¹⁰ Saturnino Martínez, who was by then publishing the periodical *La Unión*, was deported to Spain for publishing articles in sympathy with the First International in that newspaper.¹¹

After the Ten Years War the labor movement began to expand considerably. Not only the tobacco workers and the printing trades workers, who in the 1860s had been the first groups to organize, established new unions; so did construction workers, railroad workers, port workers, and as well as a number of artisan groups such as tailors, bakers, shoemakers, and coach drivers.¹² One example of these organizations was the hotel and restaurant workers union of Havana, which was founded in 1889 as a *Gremio*, rather than a "resistance society." In one form or another it continued to exist for at least the next sixty years.¹³

The labor movement began to expand outside the capital city of Havana, where it had formerly been concentrated, into nearby municipalities and the provinces of the interior. Efrén Córdova comments, "By the middle of the decade of the '80s, it was difficult to find a city of importance in Cuba where there were not groups of workers."¹⁴

This spread of trade unionism was confined almost totally to the cities and large towns. Most particularly, it had little impact on the sugar industry, the largest segment of the Cuban economy. Certainly one reason was that slavery was not finally abolished until 1886, and a substantial portion of the sugar workers were slaves. Others were people imported from China and even from the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, whose status in the sugar plantations was not far removed from slavery.

Even after emancipation, trade unionism had little immediate impact among the sugar workers. Another generation had to pass before unionization among them began to be widespread.

The United States anthropologist John Dumoulin described the situation among the sugar workers in the area of Cruces, near the city of Cienfuegos in Central Cuba in the period between the two Wars of Independence. He noted that the workers tended to organize principally on the basis of ethnicity. Thus, there existed a Club Español, a Club Asiático, and a Circulo Africano. There also existed a Club de Obreros, consisting largely of black workers and mulattoes who were oriented toward assimilation to the predominant Cuban values of the time. All of these organizations were social groups, with an orientation toward self-education and uplift. Only among the Spaniards was there some evidence of the beginning of anarchist influence.¹⁵

As the labor movement spread, it exhibited two ideological tendencies. One, usually referred to as "reformist," included Saturnino Martínez, who had returned to Cuba in 1878 and revived the tobacco workers' organization in Havana, now called the Gremio de Obreros del Ramo de Tabaquerías, of which he became the leader, as he had been a decade earlier.¹⁶

The other tendency in the labor movement after 1878 was anarchism. Stimulated in part by workers who had been active in the anarchist labor movement in Spain and had migrated to Cuba, anarchism also gained many recruits among native Cubans. One of the most outstanding Cuban anarchists was Enrique Roig San Martín, who had worked in both the sugar and tobacco industries. He became an early labor journalist, writing in *El Obrero* and the *Boletín del Gremio de Obreros*, the periodical of the Gremio de Obreros del Ramo de Tabaquerías, which, although it had been founded by Saturnino Martínez, quickly passed into the control of the anarchists. In 1887, Roig founded *El Productor*, which for some years was the leading labor publication in Havana.¹⁷

In 1879, the anarchist labor leaders established in Havana the Junta Central de Artesanos, which later changed its name to Junta Central de Trabajadores. It drew together not only the nascent trade unions but also mutual benefit organizations. It had as

its objectives the spread of labor organization and the provision of a united voice for the city's workers. After a decline, the Junta was reorganized in 1885; it was given some government recognition in October of that year.

A somewhat different kind of central group was established in Havana in February 1885. This was the *Círculo de Trabajadores de La Havana*, which was dedicated particularly to labor education, urging the unions to establish cultural activities and libraries for their members. Like the Junta, the *Círculo* had an anarchist orientation, including among its leaders some of the leading anarchists of the period, including Enrique Messonier, Enrique Crecci, and Máximo Fernández.

Soon after the establishment of the *Círculo de Trabajadores*, Messonier and Crecci toured the interior of the country, trying to encourage labor organization, as well as the establishment of specifically anarchist groups. They were successful principally in the provinces of Havana and Santa Clara.¹⁸

THE LABOR CONGRESSES OF 1887 AND 1892

The Congress of 1887, which is generally seen by historians of the Cuban labor movement as the first such conclave, was in fact a series of meetings held in Havana and neighboring towns. These were held under the aegis of the Spanish anarchist group, the *Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española*. Representatives chosen by each of these meetings gathered in Havana in November 1887 to adopt a statement of principles, which reflected the anarchosyndicalist origins of the sponsors of the gathering.¹⁹ According to the more or less official history of the Cuban organized labor published by the Castro Communist Party (as opposed to the earlier Communist Party), it was this "1887 Congress" that marked the end of control of "reformist" leaders over the Cuban labor movement.²⁰

The congress that met in Havana in January 1892 can be better regarded as the first national meeting of the Cuban labor movement, since there were present delegates from the unions from all over the country, except the city of Santiago de Cuba. The agenda for the meeting included three points: discussion of the eight-hour workday and means of obtaining it, the type of national organization the workers should establish, and any other matters that the delegates wished to suggest.

Much of the discussion of the meeting centered on the eight-hour-day question. Opinion was unanimous that workday should be limited to eight hours, not only to improve workers' health, but to allow them to educate themselves and otherwise

improve their lives. The meeting expressed the opinion that the only way to achieve this goal was a national general strike, although no steps were apparently approved to bring about such an event.

The resolution concerning future organization of the workers of the island that was adopted clearly reflected the anarchosyndicalist point of view. It urged that in each locality there to be established a workers' organization that would be divided into branches of workers in a particular trade or industry; all of these regional groups would be joined to form the *Federación de Trabajadores de Cuba*. However, each local unit of the organization should have full autonomy, and no central group should be able to impose its ideas or control on any subordinate element in the federation.

A variety of resolutions concerning other issues and problems were discussed and adopted. One of these committed Cuban organized labor to "revolutionary socialism," a phrase frequently used by the anarchosyndicalists to describe their own ideology. Another expounded extensively on the need for equality among the white and black workers of the island. Finally, a resolution that was presented argued that seeking the emancipation of the individual, as congress aspired to do "could never become an obstacle to the aspirations of the emancipation of the people."

It was perhaps this last resolve of the congress that caused the Spanish colonial government to order the dissolution of the meeting before it had concluded its business. Orders were also issued for the arrest of the delegates to the congress.²¹

LABOR ACTIVITIES BEFORE THE SECOND INDEPENDENCE WAR

The new Cuban labor movement engaged in a variety of different activities in the years before the outbreak of the Second War for Independence in 1895. In 1887, the *Círculo de Trabajadores* raised funds to send to the families of the "martyrs of Chicago," the union leaders who were put on trial after the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago. Then in 1890, the *Círculo* sponsored Cuba's first May Day demonstration in Havana, both to protest the execution of the Chicago martyrs and to advocate the institution of the eight-hour workday. Some three thousand workers gathered in a park, then marched to a theater, where twelve orators delivered speeches. There were also May Day demonstrations in the three succeeding years.²²

Strikes were relatively frequent in the 1880s and early 1890s. Between 1879 and 1900 there were eighty-three recorded strikes,

of which sixty-six took place in Havana, and twenty-seven were walkouts of tobacco workers.²³ During this period, the other workers involved in walkouts included railroaders, millers, milk workers, hotel and restaurant employees, painters, port workers, metal workers, and coach drivers.²⁴ There were even two strikes recorded in the sugar industry: one of white workers in two sugar mills in the province of Matanzas in 1880, and another by black workers in another Matanzas mill three years later.²⁵

Wages and hours were the most frequent causes of strikes. Wages generally were very low in Cuba in this period, and working hours were frequently twelve to fourteen a day. However, general working conditions, complaints about housing and meal conditions, as well as abusive treatment of workers by management also caused the workers to walk out.²⁶

Several strikes of the period are of particular interest. In 1882 there was a walkout of tailors in Havana and employers sought to recruit strikebreakers in New York City, but when the Cuban strikers appealed to their fellow workers in New York, the employers were only able to recruit seventeen scabs.²⁷

One of the most important strikes of the period was that of the coach drivers of Havana in October 1890. Some four thousand workers were involved, and they gained support from tobacco workers, bakers, bricklayers, and other groups who called sympathy strikes. However, the Spanish civil governor supported the employers' efforts to break this strike, prohibiting all meetings or demonstrations and threatening to draft the strikers into military service. As a consequence, the walkout was lost.²⁸

Two tobacco worker walkouts in Havana were particularly notable. One, in 1886, first involved workers employed in shops that used relatively inferior tobacco grown in the vicinity of Havana (second category), whose products sold at lower prices than those made with finer tobacco from the province of Pinar del Río (first category), where workers had lower wages than their fellows in first category plants. The strikers demanded to be paid the same wages as first category workers, a demand that was first supported by employers of first category shops, on the assumption that if their competitors were forced to pay higher wages, they would have to raise the prices of their products. But when workers in first category shops began to join the strike, the tobacco employers generally declared a lockout, defeating the walkout. This defeat greatly weakened the position of the reformist union leader Saturnino Martínez, who until then had been the principal tobacco workers' leader in Havana.

The use of the lockout also played a major role in another tobacco strike, in July 1888. When employees of the employers'

association, the Unión de Fabricantes de Tabaco de La Habana, demanded wage increases, the head of the association dismissed the workers who presented the demands. This act provoked a strike, which was soon joined by workers of many other tobacco firms, whereupon the employers' association declared a general lockout and refused to negotiate at all with the unions. However, the strikers sought direct negotiations with individual factory owners and soon reached agreements with more than one hundred of them, representing a serious defeat for the employers' organization.²⁹

During this 1888 strike, the tobacco workers became divided into two rival groups. One was the Alianza Obrera, of anarchist orientation and headed by Enrique Roig San Martín, Enrique Messonier and Enrique Crecci. It urged formation of a federation that included all the tobacco worker unions, as well as insisting on the equality of all workers in the industry, whether white or black, native born or immigrants. The other group was the Unión Obrera, of which the principal leader was Saturnino Martínez, the veteran reformist leader. For some time, there were serious clashes, sometimes involving the use of force, between these two workers' groups.³⁰

Carlos del Toro noted that by 1889

there were workers organizations in the principal centers of the Island of Cuba, even in the Oriente region which was hard to get to because of primitive transport conditions and communication facilities. The Circulo de Trabajadores maintained fraternal relations with the different proletarian societies in Cuban territory and even with the tobacco workers of Tampa and Key West, who were accused of being separatist and revolutionary elements.³¹

ORGANIZED LABOR DURING THE FIRST U.S. OCCUPATION

The organized labor movement suffered greatly during the Second War of Independence. According to the official history of the labor movement of the Castro Communist Party: "The organizational state of the workers of Cuba at the beginning of the North American occupation was chaotic. Very few organizations were able to survive the systematic persecution of the Spanish authorities during the period of the war; only a few remained . . . which were fundamentally made up of and led by Spaniards."³²

However, with the end of Spanish rule, the labor movement began to revive. The Círculo de Trabajadores of Havana, which had been outlawed during the war, was revived, as were a number of unions that had also been suspended during the conflict,

particularly those of tobacco workers, but also including organizations of railroaders, bakers, typographers, construction workers, tailors, and others. By the end of the occupation, there were more than thirty unions functioning in the province of Havana. However, the resurgence of unionism was not confined to the capital and its environs, but also took place in provincial cities such as Cardenas, Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba.³³

An organization that sought to unite the labor movement throughout the island, the Liga General de Trabajadores, was established in September 1899. It was organized on a regional basis, with local groups in various cities joining not only unions but other working-class organizations. Its leaders traveled in the interior, stimulating the revival of the labor movement.

The Liga General de Trabajadores did not have any very clear ideological orientation. However, it did oppose those who were then advocating that Cuba be annexed to the United States and fought for equal treatment of Cuban and Spanish workers in the island. For some years, its periodical, *Alerta!*, carried articles reflecting the various ideological tendencies then extant in the labor movement: anarchosindicalism, Marxism, and reformism. At its high point, the Liga had between 10,000 and 15,000 members. However, it did not long survive the end of the first U.S. occupation of the island.³⁴

There were dozens of strikes in Cuba during this period. Among the most frequent demands of the strikers were increases in wages, reduction of working hours, ending of discrimination against native Cuban workers, general improvement of working conditions, and protection of jobs against import competition.

The first strike after formal occupation of the island, took place in January 1899 among the port workers of Cárdenas, in the province of Matanzas, which was then the major city for export of sugar. The workers demanded payment in U.S. dollars instead of Spanish pesos, which circulated at a considerable discount, and an increase in their wages. After seventy-two hours, the walkout was settled on the basis of payment in dollars, but without a formal wage increase.

One of the most important strikes of the period was that of the construction workers of Havana, some 1,500 of whom walked out, demanding wage increases, payment in U.S. dollars, and establishment of the eight-hour day. The walkout had the backing of a number of other Havana unions, and a variety of meetings were held in its support. However, the U.S. military authorities reacted strongly against the walkout and arrested a number of the strike leaders, who were forced to appear on a balcony and urge their followers to call off the walkout. The Liga General de

Trabajadores Cubanos did not support the strike, and it was finally lost.³⁵

There even occurred a few isolated strikes among sugar workers. In the Cruces area there was such a walkout in 1902. It was held by members of the Club Africano, evidencing the melding of ethnic and trade union consciousness, and was centered among the field hands rather than the mill workers.³⁶

THE APPRENTICE STRIKE

The Cuban Republic, under President Estrada Palma, was officially launched on May Day 1902. Almost exactly six months later there occurred the first major strike of the republic's history, which, starting with the tobacco workers, became virtually a general strike in Havana and some provincial cities.

The walkout was known as the Apprentice Strike, since the principal demand put forward by the tobacco workers was an end to the system whereby only young Spanish immigrants were allowed to become apprentices, thus giving them ultimate access to the better paying jobs in the industry, while Cubans were limited to the poorer paying positions. The strikers also demanded that the number of apprentices in any tobacco shop be limited to 5 percent, and that the employers recognize the unions and meet regularly with union representatives to handle problems that might arise.

By this time, two-thirds of the tobacco industry was in the hands of two large companies, one British and one North American; while the rest of the shops, in the hands of Cubans, were generally referred to as independents. All of the employers absolutely refused to negotiate the issues that the workers' unions had raised. When the unions presented their demands to President Estrada Palma, he refused to intervene, claiming that the issue should be dealt with by the mayor of Havana.

In the face of this situation, when a strike broke out early in November in one of the North American tobacco plants over an issue unrelated to these general demands, the union leaders, who for some time had been planning for a general strike of tobacco workers, decided to call such a walkout. Quickly, all of the United States-owned plants were closed down, followed quickly by those of British ownership, and then the independents. Cuban tobacco workers in Key West and Tampa, Florida, quickly sent funds to help their striking colleagues.

The Liga General de Trabajadores Cubanos immediately declared its support for the tobacco workers' strike, and various other workers' groups also went out on strike. The movement

spread to the province of Santa Clara, where workers of Cienfuegos and Cruces joined the walkout, even including some sugar workers near the latter city, who went on strike.

On November 22, 23, and 24, 1902, the economic life of Havana was virtually closed down. The government responded to this general strike with violence. It sent out not only the urban police and army units, but also elements of the Guardia Rural to combat the walkout. Police and soldiers fired on demonstrating strikers, killing many and wounding hundreds.

Finally, a group of veterans of the Second War of Independence, headed by Máximo Gómez, decided to intervene in the situation. They negotiated with the strike leaders and President Estrada Palma, getting from the latter a promise that he would push through Congress a law opening up the ranks of apprentices to Cubans regardless of race and fixing their number at 5 percent of the work force. In the light of that promise, the strike leaders called off the walkout on November 28.

However, President Estrada Palma did not honor his promise. Instead, the government persecuted the strike leaders, arresting many of them and forcing others to flee abroad to avoid being jailed. It was not until 1933 that the apprenticeship issue was resolved when the first government of President Ramón Grau San Martín enacted a decree providing that the great majority of employees in any firm had to be native Cubans.

This "solution" of the Apprentice Strike was in fact a major defeat for organized labor. The most obvious early result of this defeat was that the Liga General de Trabajadores went out of existence a few months later.³⁷

However, the defeat of the Apprentice Strike by no means put an end to all trade union activity and militancy. There were several significant strikes in the years immediately after the 1902 general walkout. These included work stoppages in some sugar plantations in the province of Las Villas in the areas of Cruces and Lajas, one by railroaders in the Pinar del Río and another by shoemakers in the same province. During this period, the anarchist labor leaders sometimes used the boycott instead of the strike as a weapon against employers who were not willing to negotiate or to bargain effectively with the unions.³⁸

THE LABOR MOVEMENT DURING THE SECOND AMERICAN OCCUPATION

As a consequence of the political disturbances surrounding President Estrada Palma's unsuccessful attempt to extend his term in power, the second U.S. military occupation of Cuba began

on September 28, 1906. Far from resulting in a suppression of trade union activity, this second Yankee intervention seems to have served to reanimate the Cuban labor movement. In December 1908, the U.S. governor, Charles Magoon, wrote, "The industrial situation has been complicated by numerous strikes." According to him, these had occurred among tobacco workers, railroaders, masons, and several other groups.³⁹

The most famous strike during this period was that of the Havana tobacco workers in February 1907, which was popularly known as the Money Strike, since the principal matter of dispute was the kind of money in which the workers should be paid. They demanded to get their wages in U.S. dollars, instead of in the depreciated Spanish pesetas that still circulated in the island. This walkout lasted from February until July 1907. It received wide support from other labor groups, who raised funds to help the workers who were out on strike, including a contribution from Cuban tobacco workers in Key West, as well as from the Partido Socialista de Cuba. As the strike lingered on, Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Labor (himself an old cigar maker) went to Havana to express the U.S. labor movement's strong support for the walkout.

The British and American employers whose workers were out on strike remained adamant for a considerable period. They finally convinced the independent cigar makers to close down their operations, thus increasing the number of unemployed tobacco workers, but that move did not break the strike because of the financial and other aid the strikers received.

U.S. Military Governor Magoon did nothing to try to break the tobacco workers strike. Finally, he made it clear that he thought that the demand of the workers to be paid in the currency that would give them a higher income was a reasonable one. The employers finally gave in and settled the walkout on the basis of agreeing to pay the workers in dollars.⁴⁰

This success of the tobacco workers stimulated other workers to go out on strike. These included railroaders, masons, and commercial employees. The results of these walkouts varied from case to case. One notably successful strike was that of the masons of Havana in January 1908, which won wage increases and the eight-hour working day.⁴¹

The success of the Money Strike also led to the formation of the Comité Federativo. This was a loosely organized body that had the objective of forming a nationwide labor federation. Although it succeeded in rallying support for a number of the strikes of this period, it did not succeed in establishing a national labor organization.⁴²

ORGANIZED LABOR AFTER RESTORATION OF CUBAN SOVEREIGNTY

The U.S. military government finally organized elections, which were won by the Liberal Party candidate, José Miguel Gómez. He was succeeded in 1913 by a Conservative, Mario García Menocal. Neither of these governments was favorably disposed to the development of an independent labor movement, although both administrations made some efforts to establish one under the regime's influence and control. President Gómez's minister of interior, Gerardo Machado, gained particular notoriety through his authoritarian handling of organized labor.

There were a number of significant strikes during the pre-World War I years. One of the most important was the walkout of the workers constructing the sewer system of Havana. Their working conditions were very poor, accidents were frequent, and sanitary conditions were atrocious. This situation, plus the standard labor demands for higher wages and the eight-hour day, provoked a strike of 1,500 workers early in 1911.

This walkout was led by Antonio Veytes and Francisco Pérez, and the Agrupación Socialista de La Habana played a large role in directing it. However, it was finally defeated as a result of several factors. Minister of Interior Gerardo Machado severely persecuted the strike leaders, arresting many of them and deporting the two principal figures in the walkout, Veytes and Pérez. There was dissension among the strikers, 75 percent of whom were Spaniards and only 25 percent native Cubans. The government took advantage of the city's substantial unemployment to recruit strikebreakers, with the aid of the so-called Federación de Trabajadores Cubanos, which had been organized by the Gómez government. In the end, the workers did not win any of their demands.⁴³

Another significant strike that was lost was that of sugar workers of the United States-owned New Niquero Sugar Company near Manzanillo in the Province of Oriente, in January-February 1912. About 1,000 workers of this firm, principally those employed in cutting and transporting cane, participated in this walkout, demanding higher payment for the cane cut and delivered to the mill, as well as an eight-hour workday. This strike, too, was under Socialist influence, that of the Partido Socialista de Manzanillo, of which the principal leader of the walkout, Augustin Martín Véloz, was a member.

Minister of Interior Gerardo Machado went personally to Manzanillo to carry out the crushing of this strike. Its leaders, including Martín Véloz, were arrested, tortured, and then officially charged with "sedition and plotting to alter the price of labor." Al-

though substantial popular demonstrations forced the release of the prisoners, they were not sufficient to win the strike.⁴⁴

Another walkout of some importance was that of workers of the Empresa Sobriños de Herrera S.A. in the port of Havana in 1912. Its leaders were Juan Arévalo and Ramón León Rentería, who appeared for the first time as labor leaders of some importance in this walkout.⁴⁵

POLITICAL TENDENCIES WITHIN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

During the first two decades of the twentieth century there were three definable tendencies among the leaders and rank and file of the Cuban labor movement. These can be classified as anarchist, Socialist, and reformist.

The anarchists constituted the most militant and the largest element in organized labor in the island. They strongly rejected both partisan political activity and any dealings with government authorities, relying on direct action, by which they meant strikes, including general strikes; the boycott; and sometimes sabotage.

However, in spite of their widespread rank and file support, the anarchists in Cuba were not able to form a national labor organization under their guidance and control, as their confrères in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil were doing in this same period. As Efrén Córdova noted, it was particularly this deficiency that would put the anarchists at a great disadvantage when, in the 1920s, they had to face the Communists.⁴⁶

However, in 1914 an attempt was made to establish such a national labor federation. This effort was undertaken on the initiative of the Centro Obrero de Cruces, which issued a call for a national labor congress in that town on February 24 and 25, 1912. The objective of this meeting was to lay the groundwork for establishing a national labor organization, as well as to stimulate the spread of "rational education," and to establish the eight-hour workday and other gains for the workers.

A few more than twenty delegates attended this Congress of Cruces, from Havana, Matanzas, Santa Clara, Cárdenas, Cienfuegos, Remedios, Sagua, Manzanillo, San Antonio de los Baños, and Cruces. Among the delegates were bakers, shoemakers, and tobacco, port, and sugar workers, as well as people representing labor periodicals and anarchist groups. The meeting, in addition to adopting resolutions in support of the eight-hour day and a 1.50-peso minimum daily wage, selected a provisional federal committee to draw up the plans for a new national labor federation. However, these plans never came to fruition.⁴⁷

Considerably less influential, but with a following in some localities and among some kinds of workers were the more or less Marxian Socialists. The first attempt to establish a Socialist Party had been made in March 1899, with the organization of the Partido Socialista Cubano by Diego Vicente Tejera, who had been working with José Martí in exile and returned to Cuba soon after the end of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Tejera was by no means an orthodox Marxist, but he did seek to have his party represent the working classes. It was of only a few months duration, however, and in 1900 Tejera established a second party, the Partido Popular, which took a strong position against continuing United States occupation of the island. It, too, was of very short duration, and Tejera died in 1903.⁴⁸

In the year of Tejera's death, Carlos Baliño, who already had a substantial career as a labor organizer, established the Club de Propaganda Socialista. It became active in the Partido Obrero, which was established by a group of workers in Havana in 1904. In 1905, the Partido Obrero proclaimed its objective to be "the possession by the proletarian class of political power . . . so that society is organized on the basis of an economic federation . . . abolishing social classes so that there only exists one of workers, owners of the fruit of their labors, free, honorable, intelligent and equal." The party also changed its name to Partido Obrero Socialista, and Baliño became one of its principal figures.

Also in 1905, a group of Spanish immigrants who had belonged to Pablo Iglesias's Socialist Party in Spain established the Agrupación Socialista Internacional, which merged with the Partido Obrero Socialista to establish in November 1906 the Partido Socialista de la Isla de Cuba. Its periodical, *La Voz Obrera*, which had previously been published by the Partido Obrero, became one of the major advocates of the labor movement, and the Socialists' role in it.

Although the Partido Socialista de la Isla de Cuba described itself as Marxist, it was criticized by Carlos Baliño (and subsequently by the official history of Cuban labor of the Castro Communist Party) for mixing its Marxism with some ideas of Ferdinand Lasalle, for being insufficiently aware of the race problem in Cuba or of the discrimination against native-born Cubans that then existed, and for being insufficiently active in the organized labor movement.

Of more purely Marxist orientation was the Partido Socialista de Manzanillo, headed by a former anarchist, Agustín Martín Véloz, a tobacco worker. Established in 1906, it was thereafter very active in the local labor movement, taking the lead in organizing the Federación Obrera de Manzanillo and directing a number of

strikes in the area. Some of its leaders would subsequently be among the founders of the Cuban Communist Party.⁴⁹

The reformists were the second largest element in the labor movement in the two decades of the twentieth century. Unlike the anarchists and the Socialists, they were willing to work with the government. In fact, they received government aid, financial and otherwise, in organizing the largest national gathering to be held up until that time, the Congreso Obrero of August 1914. President Mario García Menocal provided 10,000 pesos for the organization of the congress, and the City Council of Havana declared the delegates "honored guests of the city" and appropriated 7,000 pesos to pay for their travel costs and their housing during the sessions of the congress. Subsequently, the organizers of the meeting published an extensive record accounting for how these funds had been spent. In the official report of the Congreso its Organizing Committee expressed their "profound thanks" to President Menocal; his secretary of justice, Dr. Cristóbal de la Guardia, who addressed the first session of the congress; and various other officials.⁵⁰

A leading role in summoning this congress was that of the Asociación Cubana para la Protección Legal del Trabajo, established in February 1914. It was set up by some reformist labor leaders, as well as some professional people interested in labor problems, and even some people associated with the Menocal administration who also supported the passage of some labor legislation. The Asociación had relations with the International Association for the Legal Protection of Labor, which had headquarters in Switzerland.⁵¹

About 1,400 delegates attended this Congreso. Almost all of them represented organizations with reformist leadership. Anarchist-controlled unions refused to have anything to do with it, and there was only a sprinkling of people from Socialist-led organizations.⁵²

Preceding the congress, an invitation had been issued not only to labor groups from all the country to send delegates, but also to individuals to submit short essays on problems that they thought faced the nation's working class. Prizes were awarded at the Congreso to those who had sent in the best essays, which included a wide range of subjects, including labor accidents, immigration, protection of jobs for native Cubans, problems of women and children workers, discussions of problems of particular workers' groups, and even one on the question of tariff protection for national industries. These essays were subsequently published, together with the minutes of various sessions of the congreso.⁵³

One of the last resolutions passed by the congreso was a call for establishment of a Partido Democrático Socialista, to be the political representative of the workers. Right after the adjournment of the congress, a number of the delegates met again to launch the new party. This action drew strong condemnation in the press from government elements who had originally patronized the congreso. The party did not survive long.⁵⁴

The leadership of the reformist element in the labor movement in this period was not homogeneous and had no cohesive ideology. For some time, Carlos Loveira, a railroader, was one of their outstanding figures, but he left the country after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, going to Yucatan, and subsequently to the United States, where he helped to organize the Pan American Federation of Labor, of which he became an official. The port workers' leader, Juan Arévalo, was another figure of significance among the reformists, although he sometimes proclaimed himself a Socialist. Efrén Córdova names Ramón Rivera, Feliciano Prieto and Manuel Candoya as other important reformist figures.⁵⁵

Efrén Córdova noted that the reformers were the most influential among the tobacco workers, in a few sugar mills, among railroad and port workers, as well as among such craft groups as the meat workers, bakers, shoemakers, and tailors. He added that "some of these groups, principally the railroaders, port workers and skilled workers in the sugar mills were among the best paid in the country, which may in part explain their support of the reformist thesis."⁵⁶

ORGANIZED LABOR IN WORLD WAR I AND IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER

The First World War had a great impact on the Cuban economy. On the one hand, it resulted in a very great stimulus to sugar production, as access to sugar for the United States and the Allied countries of Europe from other areas was curtailed, thus generating a rapidly increased demand for Cuban sugar, the price of which rose considerably. On the other hand, the demand for Cuban tobacco declined sharply, as Britain in particular sharply limited the amount of tobacco that could be imported into the country, because of limitations on shipping space resulting from the war. Also, particularly during the last two years of the war, and for a year or so thereafter, there was substantial inflation, resulting, other things being equal, in a considerable fall in real wages.

Another factor was important for the labor movement, particularly in the sugar industry, during the war and immediately

afterward. The sugar employers persuaded the government to authorize importation of very substantial numbers of workers, particularly for labor in cutting and transporting cane, from Jamaica and Haiti. It was estimated that between 1917 and 1921, some 230,000 such workers entered the country.

Organized labor expanded and was increasingly militant during this period. It was estimated that by the end of the war there were between four hundred and four hundred fifty unions in Cuba.

There were a number of important strikes during and immediately after the war. There were more than two hundred twenty walkouts between 1917 and 1920. Many were strikes in individual enterprises; some were much more extensive.

Several strikes were particularly important. One of the first of these was the walkout of 2,500 construction workers in Havana in October–November 1916. Their demands were for a reduction of working hours from nine to eight, and a 5 percent increase in wages, and the strike was generally successful. However, in 1919 there was a further construction workers walkout in the capital, particularly to force recalcitrant employers to conform to the earlier agreement, and to gain a further wage increase.

One of the most extensive strikes of the period was that of the sugar workers, particularly those of the province of Las Villas, but including some in the neighboring provinces of Matanzas and Camaguey, in 1917. This walkout was concentrated among the employees of the sugar mills, where imported foreign workers were concentrated. This walkout was led by reformist leaders and was in many cases more or less spontaneous, rather than organized by the unions. The government reacted with particular violence against this strike, sending in troops and in some cases using them as strikebreakers. Most of the people leading the walkout were arrested. Finally, U.S. marines were landed in some areas, allegedly to "protect" United States-owned plantations. However, the American firms involved were not successful in efforts to recruit strikebreakers from the United States. The strike was lost.⁵⁷

A curious aspect of this sugar strike was the use apparently made of it by President Menocal in negotiations with the U.S. government. At that time, the United States was buying all of the Cuban sugar crop at a fixed price, a price that made both the sugar producers and Menocal unhappy. He apparently used the strike as an argument for pushing up the price.⁵⁸

Late in 1917 there was a strike of railroad men in the province of Camaguey. The railroad companies involved recruited four to five hundred skilled workers from the United States to act as

strikebreakers. When the strike leaders contacted Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, to protest this, he went to Cuba, lodged a protest with the Cuban government, and personally addressed the American workers, urging them not to allow themselves to be used to break the strike, as a result of which they returned home.⁵⁹ The strikers gained a victory on only "some points" in their demands.⁶⁰

Late in 1918 there was a walkout of the port workers of Havana, who were demanding wage increases. Although the government of President Menocal first used force against the walkout, arresting the strike leaders and deporting those who were not native-born Cubans, it soon relented, fearing that Cuba's foreign trade would be seriously damaged. It appointed an arbitration commission, which rendered a decision not only granting the union demands, but also establishing a system of rotating employment among longshoremen, replacing daily competition for jobs.

In 1919 there were three strikes of printing trades workers of Havana. The first of these arose when a number of employers refused to pay double wages to workers who went to their jobs on a "day of mourning" officially decreed by the Menocal government at the time of the death of Theodore Roosevelt. The second was in protest against the very low wages and ill treatment of apprentices by some employers. The third occurred when the employers rejected a series of demands by the Asociación de Tipógrafos. All three walkouts were won by the unionists, the first two by mutual agreement with the employer, the third as a result of an arbitrator's decision.

The strike was not the only weapon used by the unions during and right after the First World War. Some organizations, particularly those under anarchist leadership, used the boycott; in still other cases there was some resort to sabotage. The sympathy strike was also frequently used, provoking a strong attack on the idea by President Menocal.

The Menocal government more frequently than not resorted to various degrees of force to try to curb the strikes. Troops were sometimes used, as we have noted, and there was frequent resort to arrest of strike leaders and deportation of those who were foreigners. However, in a number of cases, the government appointed conciliators and/or arbitrators to try to seek a solution or to impose one if conciliation was not effective.⁶¹

THE FEDERACIÓN OBRERA DE LA HABANA AND OTHER NEW ORGANIZATIONS

During World War I and the immediate postwar years, a number of important new labor groups were organized both in Havana and in the provinces. Among the latter were the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Provincia de Camaguey, the Federación Obrera de Cienfuegos, the Unión General de Trabajadores Agrícolas e Industriales de la Provincia de Matanzas, and the Gremio de Mineros de Pinar del Río.

One of the most important new organizations in Havana was the Federación Obrera de la Bahía de La Habana, of the port workers of the capital city. They were a particularly militant group in this period, although they were under so-called reformist leadership, headed by Juan Arévalo. According to the captain of the Port of Havana, there were in September 1918 some 5,430 organized port workers. Even the official history of organized labor published by the Castro Communist Party recognized, "In spite of being partisans of conciliation and arbitration, these leaders directed numerous successful actions of the port workers in favor of their demands."

Another key group established in Havana during this period was the Sindicato General de Obreros de la Industria Fabril, established in August 1917, which was "one of the most combative organizations of the period" and was under anarchist leadership. It had in its ranks groups of factory workers in the candy, soap, paper, cigar, and beer industries, among others. Among its principal leaders were Angel Arias and Margarito Iglesias.

An important organization was also established among the tobacco workers. This was the Federación de Torcedores de las Provincias de la Habana y Pinar del Río, covering one of the important craft groups among the tobacco workers in both Havana and the province of Pinar del Río.

Finally, the railroad workers succeeded in forming a single national organization in 1924, the Hermandad Ferroviaria (Railroaders Brotherhood). Obviously, its name indicated that it was much influenced by the railroad brotherhoods of the United States, although unlike them it organized the workers in a single group instead of individual crafts.⁶²

The most important labor organization established in this period was the Federación Obrera de La Habana, which drew together a varied group of unions in and around the capital city. The precursor to the foundation of this federation was the Labor Congress of 1920, which was attended by delegations from 102 organizations in various parts of the country.

The meeting originally had on its agenda two questions: how to combat the rising cost of living, and whether or not to send delegates to the Second Congress of the Pan American Federation of Labor, which had been founded in December 1918. The delegates to the 1920 congress were unanimous in their belief that drastic steps needed to be taken to deal with the inflation that was then rampant. They adopted a number of resolutions suggesting government action to that end. However, there was no such unanimity concerning the Pan American Federation. Although some delegates led by Juan Arévalo strongly urged that delegates be sent to its meeting, a larger group of more radical congress members, led by the anarchosyndicalist Alfredo López, opposed the idea, and it was defeated.

The 1920 congress went on to discuss many other issues that were not on its original agenda. The most important was the need for establishing a national labor confederation. It was agreed to call a congress of labor organizations of all ideological orientations to establish such a confederation; a provisional committee was elected to organize a congress for that purpose. However, the Menocal government was strongly opposed to the idea and arrested most of the members of the provisional committee, putting an end for the time being to efforts to establish a national central labor organization.

However, in spite of this obvious governmental hostility, plans went forward to establish at least a federation of unions in the capital city. A meeting to that end finally occurred on October 4, 1921. It set up the *Federación Obrera de La Habana*, which for the next decade and a half was to play a major role in the Cuban labor movement. Alfredo López, the anarchist leader of the printing trades workers, soon emerged as the leading figure in this federation.

The founding congress of the *Federación Obrera de La Habana* adopted a number of significant resolutions. These included motions urging the suppression of piecework wage payments, equality of pay for men and women workers, and the limitation of work by minors to six hours a day.

The overall anarchosyndicalist tenor of the founding congress was indicated by its declaration of principles. It proclaimed that the new organization would be open to all "Workers Resistance Societies that have as their principles the class struggle, direct action and collectively reject electoral action."

The *Federación Obrera de La Habana* had about twenty organizations in its ranks a year after its formation.⁶³

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE EARLY 1920s

The economic boom experienced by Cuba, and particularly its sugar industry, during World War I came to a sudden end in 1920 and 1921. During the conflict, Cuban sugar production had risen from 2,428,732 tons in 1913 to 4,009,734 tons in 1919, and the price of sugar had increased from 1.95 cents a pound in 1913 to 22.00 cents in February 1920. However, by September of the latter year the price had fallen to 3.75 cents a pound.⁶⁴

The upshot of this sudden crisis was that a large proportion of the Cuban-owned sugar firms that had borrowed very heavily from the foreign banks operating in Cuba were unable to pay their debts. As a consequence, these banks, which held mortgages on the sugar haciendas, suddenly became their owners. Many Cuban-owned banks, with fewer resources than the foreign ones, also found themselves bankrupt.

The governments of President Menocal and his successor, President Alfredo Zayas, were helpless to deal with the sudden crisis. A move by Menocal to declare a bank moratorium, whereby they had to pay only 10 percent of their deposits to those holding them, was opposed by the United States government and had to be canceled.

Soon afterward, the U.S. president, Warren Harding, sent a special representative to Cuba, Enoch H. Crowder. In effect, he dictated the economic policy of President Zayas, including negotiation of a loan from the J. P. Morgan Company for \$50 million and drastic cutting of the Cuban government budget. Payments on the Morgan loan began to fall due in 1923.⁶⁵

REACTION OF ORGANIZED LABOR TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Inevitably much of the burden of the economic crisis fell on the Cuban workers, particularly upon those in the sugar industry. Employers sought drastically to cut wages and otherwise to reduce labor costs. Understandably, the sugar workers fought back against these measures.

However, the sugar workers were not generally organized. There were apparently only two firmly established sugar workers unions at this time. Hence, when strikes occurred, they were usually more or less spontaneous, and not very well organized.

In November 1922 strikes broke out in two sugar *centrales* in the province of Camaguey. The workers demanded payment of wages that were four months in arrears, as well as wage increases and prompt payment henceforth. The Rural Guard was sent in to

occupy both of the plantations, but local support, even among merchants, was such that an agreement was finally reached between the strikers and the owners providing for the return to work of all the strikers without reprisals, wage payments every two weeks, and substantial wage increases.

Then in 1924 and 1925 there were walkouts involving some 3,000 cane cutters in the provinces of Havana and Camaguey. All of these strikes were lost as a result of poor organization and government repression.

Another walkout in 1924 involved thirty *centrales* in an area stretching from Havana province to Oriente. In this case, the walkout had the support of the railroaders, the port workers, and the Federación Obrera de La Habana. We have no information concerning the outcome of this strike.⁶⁶

During the early 1920s there were also important strikes by a wide variety of other workers in various parts of the country. These included railroad men, port workers, chauffeurs, printing trades employees, and several groups of industrial workers.

The railroaders were particularly militant in this period. In February 1924 most of the country's railroad workers were in the Hermandad Ferroviaria. However, the railroad companies were for the most part not willing to recognize the union. Archibald Jack, the manager of Ferrovios Consolidados, a British-owned company, was particularly adamant about recognizing Local 2 of the Hermandad in Havana, so the workers went on strike on February 23, 1924, and won recognition within twenty-four hours.

However, that strike did not resolve the problems of union recognition on the railroads. On May Day 1924, when a majority of railroad workers refused to go to their jobs on the workers' holiday, the same Archibald Jack dismissed two hundred of them. This action was countered by a general railroad strike called by the Hermandad Ferroviaria, which involved 12,500 workers. The strikers demanded not only general recognition of the Hermandad, but also substantial wage increases. The walkout lasted twenty-one days and was marked by considerable violence. President Zayas finally intervened, naming a three-person arbitration team, which quickly put forward a proposal that acceded to most of the workers' demands; reportedly President Zayas himself convinced Archibald Jack to accept it.⁶⁷

Within the railroad workers' organization, there were two factions. The top leadership was in the hands of reformists, who were willing to allow government conciliation and arbitration procedures in their disputes. This group was led by Juan Arévalo and Otero Busch. The other, more militant, faction was led by

Enrique Varona, head of the union on the Ferrocarril del Norte de Cuba, and was more ready to resort to strikes.

The port workers were also under reformist leadership in this period. With the approval of their unions there was established by the Zayas government in 1923 the *inteligencia portuaria*, an arrangement whereby tripartite boards with union, management and government representatives were established, to seek to mediate conflicts that might arise on the docks. The anarchists, who still represented a substantial part of the port workers, were strongly opposed to these agreements.⁶⁸

One of the most notable labor conflicts of this period involved the Polar Brewery. When the owners of the brewery refused to honor the terms of an existing collective agreement and treated the workers in ways they considered "abusive," the Sindicato General de la Industria Fabril not only called a strike in the brewery in 1921, but organized a widespread boycott of Polar beer. This boycott, supported by the Federación Obrera de La Habana, continued for three years, in the face of strong government opposition. The police not only arrested the union leaders and outlawed the Sindicato General de la Industria Fabril, but also put three leaders of the union on trial on the charge of having poisoned Polar beer. Although the prosecuting attorney demanded the death penalty for the three, they were given amnesty by President Zayas in the face of a general strike declared by the Federación Obrera de La Habana.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

By the middle of the 1920s, the Cuban labor movement included a substantial number of wage earners in Havana and the island's other cities. Collective bargaining on a regular basis was by no means as yet a characteristic feature of labor relations, and there was still little labor legislation, either protecting the workers against risks or authorizing unions and seeking to regularize their relations with employers.

There had begun to emerge some more or less centralized labor groups, either on an occupational basis, such as the Hermandad Ferroviaria, or on a regional one, such as the Federación Obrera de La Habana. However, there had not yet emerged a national central organization—that would be the next major development within the labor movement.

In these early decades of Cuban organized labor there were three noticeable ideological orientations, the anarchosyndicalists, the Socialists, and the so-called reformists, of which the first was by far the largest. That too would change before very long.

NOTES

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2. Efrén Córdova, *Clase Trabajadora y Movimiento Sindical en Cuba, Volumen I (1819-1959)*, Ediciones Universal, Miami, 1995, page 150.
3. Riera Hernández, 1965, op. cit., page 17.
4. Córdova, op. cit., pages 24-31.
5. Ibid., page 36.
6. Ibid., page 37.
7. Ibid., pages 40-43. See also Riera Hernández, op. cit., page 18; *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano 1865-1958, Tomo I, 1865-1935*, Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba anexo al Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Editoria Política, La Habana, 1985, pages 22-29; and Carlos del Toro, *El Movimiento Obrero Cubano en 1914*, Instituto del Libro, La Habana, 1969, pages 43-44.
8. del Toro, op. cit., page 45.
9. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., page 31.
10. Ibid., page 35; and Córdova, op. cit., page 65.
11. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 36-37.
12. Córdova, op. cit., page 44.
13. Interview with José Mandado, President of Sociedad de Dependientes de Hoteles, Restaurantes y Fondas, in Havana, Cuba, September 6, 1949.
14. Córdova, op. cit., page 44.
15. Interview with John Dumoulin, United States anthropologist, in New Brunswick, NJ, October 8, 1973.
16. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., page 46.
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18. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 47-49; see also del Toro, op. cit., pages 50-51.
19. Córdova, op. cit., pages 73-74; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 61-63.
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21. Córdova, op. cit., pages 73-74; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 73-84.
22. Córdova, op. cit., pages 74-75; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 71-73.
23. Córdova, op. cit., page 66.
24. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano, etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., page 65.
25. Córdova, op. cit., page 66.
26. Ibid., page 68; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., page 64.
27. Córdova, op. cit., page 65.

28. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 126.
29. Ibid., pages 66-67.
30. Ibid., pages 67-69.
31. del Toro, op. cit., page 54.
32. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 126.
33. Ibid., page 126; and Córdova, op. cit., pages 82-83.
34. Córdova, op. cit., pages 82-84; Riera Hernández, op. cit., page 26; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 127-132.
35. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 129-132; and del Toro, op. cit., pages 63-64.
36. Interview with John Dumoulin, op. cit., October 8, 1973.
37. Carlos Fernández R., "Apuntes Para Una Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano," (Manuscript), n.d.; CTC, magazine of Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, Havana, September 1944; Córdova, op. cit., pages 91-95; *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 135-140; Riera Hernández, op. cit., pages 34-35; del Toro, op. cit., pages 66-67.
38. Córdova, op. cit., pages 95-96.
39. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 155.
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42. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 159.
43. Ibid., pages 163-164; and Córdova, op. cit., pages 99-100; del Toro, op. cit., page 72.
44. Córdova, op. cit., page 100; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 162-163.
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46. Córdova, op. cit., page 107.
47. Ibid., pages 109-110; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 173-175.
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50. *Memoria de los Trabajos Presentados al Congreso Nacional Obrero*, Imprenta y Papelería La Universal, La Habana, 1915, pages 4-5, 11, 147-157.
51. del Toro, op. cit., pages 163-164.
52. Córdova, op. cit., page 110.
53. *Memoria de los Trabajos etc.*, op. cit., pages 161-377; for further information on the 1914 congress see also *Historia del Movimiento Obrero*

Cubano etc., Tomo I, op. cit., pages 168-172; Córdova, op. cit., pages 110-114; and del Toro, op. cit., pages 117-126, 130-133.

54. del Toro, op. cit., pages 126-128.

55. Córdova, op. cit., pages 108.

56. Ibid., page 108.

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58. Interview with John Dumoulin, op. cit., October 8, 1973.

59. Juan Arévalo, *Problemas de la Unidad Obrera en América*, Havana, 1946, page 55; and Riera Hernández, op. cit., page 47.

60. Córdova, op. cit., page 120.

61. Unless otherwise noted, foregoing from Córdova, op. cit., pages 117-124; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 177-185, 198-200.

62. Foregoing from *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 201-203.

63. Ibid., pages 205-208; see also Riera Hernández, op. cit., page 49.

64. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 212.

65. Ibid., pages 213-215.

66. Ibid., pages 217-218.

67. Ibid., pages 220; see also Riera Hernández, op. cit., pages 57-58 and Córdova, op. cit., pages 140-141.

68. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 220-221.

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The Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba and Its Rivals

In the year 1925 two organizations were established that were to play a major role in Cuban organized labor. One was the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (CNOC), the country's first national central labor organization, which was for a decade to be the largest element in the labor movement. The second was the Communist Party of Cuba, which was soon to become the most powerful political element working within Cuban organized labor.

FOUNDING OF THE CONFEDERACIÓN NACIONAL OBRERA DE CUBA

The establishment of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba was the result of two congresses, one held in Cienfuegos in February 1925, the other in Camaguey in August of the same year. The first of these was a preparatory meeting, which drew up a Declaration of Principles for the new organization and named an organizing committee to issue invitations to and prepare for the actual founding meeting of the new central labor body.

What was called the Third National Labor Congress of Cuba then met in August and established the CNOC. That meeting was attended by delegates from eighty-two organizations, while another forty-six sent messages indicating their support for the confederation to be established. It was claimed at the time that there were 200,000 workers represented, in one way or another, at the founding congress of the CNOC. However, this was undoubtedly a considerable exaggeration. For one thing, only two organizations of sugar workers were represented, since that group, the largest single element in the Cuban working class, was

still largely unorganized. Also, important groups of workers in Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara, and Sagua la Grande were not represented. The *Hermanidad Ferroviaria*, the railroaders' national union, which had been founded the year before, was represented only by an observer rather than a full-fledged delegate.

The founding congress of the CNOC laid great stress on the need for the unity of the workers, and there were elements present from all three major ideological tendencies that then existed within the labor movement: the anarchosyndicalists, the reformists, and the Communists. However, the initiative for the formation of the confederation had largely been taken by the *Federación Obrera de La Habana*, which was still controlled by the anarchosyndicalists, and they were clearly the dominant element in the meeting.

Anarchosyndicalist influence was reflected in many of the resolutions passed at the gathering. The group pledged its support for direct action, the class struggle, general strikes, and rejection of political action. It provided that no one could be elected to its executive "who conducted active propaganda for political parties." The meeting also rejected the idea of asking for government labor reforms.

The meeting dealt with many other problems. It urged equality of treatment of workers of all races. It strongly opposed the policy of succeeding governments of deporting labor leaders who were not native Cubans. It stressed the struggle for the eight-hour day and proclaimed that the ultimate objective of this struggle should be the establishment of the four-hour working day. It was decided that the new confederation would not affiliate with any existing international labor grouping, but resolved that the CNOC should itself call a congress of Latin American union movements to establish a federation among them.

In terms of organization, the founding congress of the CNOC urged formation of industrial unions, which should be grouped together in national federations, as well as regional federations of CNOC affiliates. It declared its opposition to formation of rival organizations where unions already existed.

The Camaguey congress chose a provisional executive committee for the new CNOC. Some months later, representatives of twenty-two unions chose a definitive committee. In both cases, the members of the committees were relative unknowns. Thus, Alfredo López and Antonio Penichet, the anarchosyndicalists who had clearly been the people with greatest influence in the congress, were not among the members of the national committee. Perhaps this was a move to shield the confederation from the per-

secution of the clearly antilabor government of President Gerardo Machado, which had recently taken office.¹

Although the anarchosyndicalists clearly were the dominant element in the founding congress of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, they soon lost control of it. According to the official history of Cuban organized labor of the Castro Communist Party, the Communists had gained control of the organization by 1927.²

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA

The triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in November 1917, and the subsequent establishment of the Communist International in 1919, aroused considerable interest and enthusiasm in the Cuban labor movement. As elsewhere, there were both anarchists and Socialists among the early Cuban supporters of the Soviet regime. There were proclamations and demonstrations of support for the regime during the Russian civil war (1918–1921). Although there were many in the ranks of both anarchists and Socialists who had become disillusioned with Soviet Russia by the early 1920s, some of the most prominent anarchist labor people, such as Alfredo López, continued to be kindly disposed toward it, although they did not join the Communist Party of Cuba when it was formed.³

It was principally from the Socialists, joined by some elements of the newly militant student movement, most notably Julio Antonio Mella, that the ranks of the new Communist Party were drawn. In July 1922, the Agrupación Socialista de La Habana adopted a Declaration of Principles that declared that "it is identified with the revolutionary principles which sustain the Russian Revolution, that it will follow the tactics of the III International which is based in Moscow; and condemns the II International because of its betrayal of socialist principles at the beginning of the European War."⁴

Although he had largely drawn up this Declaration of Principles, Carlos Baliño, the veteran labor leader and Socialist, soon became unhappy about what he regarded as the Agrupación Socialista's failure to put the declaration into practice. He took the lead, therefore, in founding the Agrupación Comunista de La Habana in March 1923. Three months later, a similar group was set up in Guanabacoa, under the leadership of the local tobacco workers union leader, Venancio Rodríguez.

The Agrupación Comunista de La Habana included in its ranks—which amounted to only twenty-seven members—not only

Baliño but also several tobacco union leaders. Julio Antonio Mella, the student leader, also joined it. The group undertook to distribute several Spanish Communist periodicals, as well as some pamphlet literature. In March 1924, it began to publish its own paper, *Lucha de Clases*.⁵

Finally, the founding congress of the Communist Party of Cuba took place in August 1925. There were not more than twenty people present at this meeting—which to prevent police interference took place in the homes of several members of the Havana group—and there were present representatives of only four of the nine local Communist groups that were known to exist. Enrique Flores Magón, the Mexican former anarchist who was by then a leader of the Mexican Communist Party, apparently presided over the sessions of the founding congress of the party of Cuba.

The meeting formally adopted "democratic centralism" as the guiding principle of its organizational structure. It also voted to join the Communist International. It did not adopt a document elaborating in any detail its ideology and philosophy but rather "adopted a concrete program of demands for the workers and peasants which would permit the establishment with them of fraternal ties of struggle."

The congress elected a nine-man Central Committee. Most prominent among them were Carlos Boliño and Julio Antonio Mella. Five were manual workers and three were important trade union leaders: Alejandro Barreiro of the Cigar Makers Union and financial secretary of the Federación Obrera de la Habana; Miguel Valdés, a leader of the Tobacco Workers Union of San Antonio de los Baños; and José Peña Vilaboa, leader of the Painters Union of Havana and first secretary general of the Federación Obrera de la Habana.⁶

COMMUNIST OPERATIONS IN THE UNIONS

From its establishment, the Communist Party concentrated heavily on the work within the labor movement. Efrén Córdova sketched the nature of this activity:

The party put emphasis on the formation of dedicated and competent leaders, employed full time, who could obtain advantages for the workers, explain the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism and be in a position to polemicize with their opponents. First they had to train organizers and then negotiators. The organizers not only served to establish new unions but also to penetrate the leadership of those already existing. The negotiators bargained for gains or opposed wage reductions with the purpose of giving prestige to the party among the mass of workers and peasants. Both groups were trained in the art and practice of debating.⁷

Jorge García Montes and Antonio Alonso Avila, in their history of the Cuban Communist Party, argued that in the beginning the Communists, "Rather than combatting the ideas which prevailed then . . . concerned themselves before anything else, with attaining positions in the trade union organisms which were being created under the impetus of the anarchists and of the reformists. They were more successful in the first than in the second."⁸ Given the small size of the party at its inception, this was perhaps the only effective tactic open to them.

Quite early on, the Communists set up cells within unions controlled by their opponents, particularly the reformists. The official history of the Cuban labor movement of the Castro Communist Party commented:

In these sectors was begun the organization of *revolutionary trade union oppositions*, directed against the economist policy or the class collaboration of those leadership . . . which had as essential objectives the raising of the struggle of the workers for their demands and rights against the divisionist action and the submission to Machado of their leaders, for unity with the workers of the whole country in defense of democratic liberties and trade union rights. (Emphasis in the original)

This study noted particularly the groups established in Hermanidad Ferroviaria, the tobacco industry, the commercial employees, the trolley car workers, and the hotel and restaurant workers.⁹

As we have noted, the Communists largely took over the leadership of the CNOC in 1927. Their success was achieved largely at the expense of the anarchosyndicalists. Some of the principal anarchist leaders, such as Alfredo López, were assassinated by the Machado regime, but this was not the principal cause of their disappearance as the principal political group within the labor movement. Their long-term failure—in contrast to their counterparts in Argentina or even Mexico—to establish a structured organization, their almost fanatical insistence on the "sovereignty" of each local group or union, as well as their insistence that trade union leaders not be paid full-time officials made them no match for the tight organization, strong discipline, and substantial financial resources of the Communists.¹⁰

One result of the Communists' capture of control of the CNOC was the affiliation of the confederation with the segment of the international labor movement controlled by the Communist International. Bernardo Lobo of the CNOC attended the celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the establishment of the Bolshevik regime in Moscow late in 1927 and while there signed a statement which was the first step taken by the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) to set up its own confederation in Latin America.¹¹

Then the CNOC sent José Rego to represent it at the 1929 Montevideo conference that established the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana (CSLA), with which the CNOC became affiliated.¹²

ATTACKS OF THE MACHADO REGIME ON THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Gerardo Machado became president of Cuba at almost the same time that the CNOC and Communist Party were founded. In the 1924 election, he had run against former president, Menocal; according to the reformist union leader Juan Arévalo, Machado's "political campaign was made on the basis of magnificent promises for the improvement of Cuban life; and especially for the working class." On the basis of these promises, some of the reformist labor leaders supported him in the campaign.¹³

However, Machado's own past might well have indicated to those union leaders who supported him in 1924 that he was no friend of organized labor. We have noted earlier his antilabor actions when he was minister of interior of the government of President José Miguel Gómez, when he had violently suppressed strikes, sometimes taking personal charge of such actions.

Machado's antilabor attitude had not changed. During his first visit to the United States after his election he announced that during his administration no strike would be allowed to last more than twenty-four hours. As Efrén Córdova noted, "Machado declared himself from the beginning an adversary of trade unionism and chose as the field of battle the only arm of defense of the workers."¹⁴

Machado presided over one of the most tyrannical regimes the Republic of Cuba experienced. He organized a formidable secret police that not only jailed, tortured, and killed his opponents inside Cuba, but was also credited with physically eliminating some of those who had fled into exile. In 1928 he insisted on having the constitution changed to permit his reelection, and managed to remain in office for more than eight years.

Machado wasted little time after taking office before he began persecuting the labor movement. In August 1925 there was a strike in three sugar plantations in the province of Camaguey, as the workers demanded that the Yankee managers recognize their union. The railroad workers of the area, whose principal leader was Enrique Varona, one of the more militant leaders of the *Hermanidad Ferroviaria*, declared their backing for the strike. As a consequence, Varona was arrested, accused of planting a bomb on railroad tracks serving one of the plantations involved in the

strike. He was released from jail on September 15 but was assassinated four days later by two members of the Guardia Rural.¹⁵

Varona was only the first of several labor leaders to be killed at the hands of the Machado regime. Efrén Córdova noted that the assassination of Varona "was like a proclamation that the government directed to the country, declaring itself the enemy of the working class in general, and not only of its more radical elements." Three other railroad workers' leaders were killed shortly after the elimination of Varona, and in July 1926, Alfredo López, the country's most outstanding labor leader, was arrested, tortured, and assassinated by the police—his remains were found after the fall of Machado. Another significant victim was José Cuxart Falcón, a leader of the Sindicato General de Obreros de la Industria Fabril (which Machado had outlawed), who was a victim of a favorite procedure of the Machado dictatorship: "shot while trying to escape."¹⁶

Writing a few months before the overthrow of Machado, Russell Porter summed up the dictator's early drive against the workers' organizations: "President Machado began to crush the organized labor movement in his first year in office. He used the army to break the 1925 railroad strike at Camaguey, and it is charged that the military authorities killed thirty labor leaders at that time. Since then there have been frequent deportations and disappearances of alien and radical labor leaders."¹⁷

DECLINE AND RECOVERY OF THE CNOC

From 1925 through 1928 the Cuban organized labor movement, particularly the CNOC, was in retreat. The official history of the Castro Communist Party noted the "rachitic" state of the CNOC during this period.¹⁸

Barry Carr noted the toll that Machado's persecution had taken on the Communist Party, which by this time controlled the CNOC. The party was concentrated mainly in Havana and a few port cities; many of its original cadres had been deported if they were foreigners or had in any case fled abroad, leading the Cuban party to ask for the help of its U.S. counterpart to locate its exiled cadres and help them get back to Cuba.¹⁹

During the 1920s and afterward there were widely varying estimates of the size of the membership of the CNOC. Early in its existence, it claimed some 200,000 members, a total that undoubtedly was an exaggeration. By 1929, an official Communist source said that there were only 20,000 members.²⁰ The Chilean historian of Latin American organized labor Moises Poblete Tron-

coso claimed that in 1930 there were only 4,000 members in the CNOC, and 16,000 in all "revolutionary trade unions."²¹

However, starting in the latter part of 1929, the labor movement began to become more militant. In September, the CNOC published a new program, which included demands for vacations of one month each year, establishment of a minimum wage and of a general social security program, aid to the unemployed, improvement of working conditions of women and children, an end to discrimination based on race and nationality, and the rights of free speech, freedom of assembly, and the strike.

The apparent renewed militancy of the CNOC was met with a decree of the Machado government outlawing it, as well as the Federación Obrera de La Habana and several other union groups. Also, a number of union headquarters were closed down by the government.²²

However, from its position of illegality, the CNOC launched a call for a nationwide twenty-four-hour general strike in protest against the Machado regime's outlawing of various labor groups, as well as its failure to help the unemployed and its general destruction of civil liberties. The Machado government sought to prevent the strike by arresting more than a score of union leaders, including officials of the CNOC and the Havana Branch #2 of the Hermandad Ferroviaria, on March 18, 1930. The *New York Times* reported, "While sections of the national police, the secret service and the judicial police were arresting men concerned with the projected strike another group of police were busily engaged in raiding all labor unions and organizations."²³

Subsequently, the Communists claimed that 200,000 workers had participated in this walkout, although admitting that it was confined largely to Havana and Manzanillo.²⁴ Jorge García Montes and Antonio Alonso Avila, in their history of the Cuban Communist Party, said that it did not extend beyond Havana.²⁵ The *New York Times* reported the day after the walkout: "Street car and omnibus lines were tied up, although some taxicabs, interurban lines and railroads continued to operate. The majority of trade shops were closed, as were coffee shops, cigar factories, sugar mills and sugar cane fields."

The *Times* also reported on a peculiar aspect of the March 20, 1930, strike. A delegation headed by Rubén Martínez Villena, the head of the CNOC, talked to President Machado, presenting their demands and assuring him that the walkout would be peaceful. For his part, Machado assured them that the illegalization of the CNOC was not yet definitive and could be reversed by the Supreme Court.²⁶

The strike was followed by large-scale demonstrations on May 1, when the workers were also urged by the CNOC not to go to work. The May day meeting in Havana received a message from Rubén Martínez Villena, who had been forced to go into exile. When the demonstrators sought to march after their meeting, they were fired by the police, resulting in the death of two workers and the wounding of fourteen others.²⁷

There were a number of important economic strikes during the early 1930s. In 1930, these included walkouts of shoemakers, Havana bus drivers, hat workers, bakers, textile workers, and various groups of tobacco workers in Havana and other cities.²⁸ In 1931, one of the most important strikes was that of the trolley car workers on Havana, which was backed by the tobacco workers, and in support of which the CNOC called a general strike, which failed.

In 1932, the most significant urban walkout was that of 15,000 tobacco workers, which lasted 108 days. When the CNOC suggested that it call a general strike, the tobacco workers' organization, the Federación Nacional de Torcedores, rejected the idea, preferring to deal directly with the employers, rather than to convert their walkout into a general political protest.²⁹

Russell Porter noted that after this tobacco strike, "President Machado . . . virtually outlawed strikes. The school teachers threatened to strike last because their salaries were months in arrears, but the government quickly blocked the proposed strike by threatening to use the army. More than 100 labor leaders are said to be held in prison, many of them incommunicado, on charges of communism and terrorism." Porter also noted: "No organized labor movement exists openly today. . . . What labor movement still exists is underground and meetings are held in secret. The military authorities have closed labor headquarters and allow no open meetings without permits from the army."³⁰

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SUGAR WORKERS

Until the early 1930s, labor in the country's most important industry remained largely unorganized. However, in the early 1930s, the Communist Party, and the CNOC, which it controlled, set out with some success to unionize those working in that industry.

In the period following the March 1930 general strike, the Communist Party and the CNOC, to some degree because of directives from the Communist Party of the United States and the Caribbean Bureau of the Communist International (located in New York City), decided to turn their attention chiefly to organiz-

ing rural workers. By then the party already had some influence among sugar workers in a few municipalities in the province of Havana, as well as in the town of Banes, where one of the two largest mills of the United Fruit Company was located, and in Jaguey Grande in Matanzas province. It had even established in the last of these places a union, which was quite short-lived.

However, the decision was made to concentrate organizing activities for the time being in Santa Clara province. For this purpose, organizers were called in from outside the province. By September 1930, the party had a branch in the northern Santa Clara town of Encrucijada, and Jesus Menéndez and two other comrades had established a union in the Constancia sugar mill near the town.

In 1931 the party and the CNOC made an intensive study, including a detailed questionnaire, of conditions in three plantations in the province of Havana and two in Santa Clara. After this, the CNOC established a special commission to recruit sugar workers. With the help especially of urban-based Communists from the city of Manzanillo, party cells were established late in 1931 in several sugar plantations in Camaguey and Oriente provinces.

Early in 1932 plans to establish the first national sugar workers' organization began. Since as yet there were few if any formally organized unions, those efforts were perforce concentrated on individuals and small groups of workers who had been recruited by the party and/or the CNOC. These efforts bore fruit in a meeting held clandestinely in Santa Clara in December 1932, attended by workers from thirty-two sugar *centrales* in all six Cuban provinces. It declared the existence of the Sindicato Nacional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera (SNOIA).³¹

This conference agreed on a campaign to organize unions, in each case joining the same organization workers in the sugar mills and offices, and the cutters and transporters of cane. It also drew up a manifesto setting forth the generalized demands of the sugar workers and agreed that the first step in organizing unions should be the establishment of "struggle committees."³²

Efrén Córdova said that this establishment of the first national sugar worker union reflected in part the economic crisis that was facing the sugar industry as a result of the Great Depression. But he added that "it was also the fruit of a long preparatory work of the trade union leaders (principally Communists), as well as the culminating point of a large accumulation of complaints and frictions. It was not possible at this point to continue ignoring the need to put an end to the overweening and dictatorial power of the administrators of the plantations."³³

The establishment of the SNOIA was followed during the 1932-1933 harvest season by a wave of strikes. They were particularly prevalent in the area around the city of Manzanillo in Oriente Province and throughout the province of Santa Clara, where they were said to have involved 20,000 workers in twenty different *centrales*.³⁴

THE REFORMIST UNIONS

The Confederación Obrera Nacional de Cuba was by no means the only central labor group during the Machado period. Although the Communists soon eclipsed the anarchists within the CNOC, the third ideological-political element in the Cuban labor movement, the reformists, continued to be an important factor.

The Hermandad Ferroviaria, established shortly before Machado took power, continued to be principally under reformist leadership, although there was a substantial radical opposition group within the organization. It joined the Pan American Federation of Labor, to which the American Federation of Labor and the Mexican CROM also belonged.³⁵

Another important union group that remained predominantly, although not completely, under reformist control during the Machado period was the Maritime Federation. There, too, were segments of the federation that were militantly opposed to the reformist leadership.³⁶

In 1925 these two unions, as well as that of the woodworkers and several other smaller ones, joined to form the Federación Cubana del Trabajo, headed by Luis Fabregat, which claimed some 40,000 members in 1929. In 1930, the federation split, and the Unión Federativa Nacional Obrera was formed under the leadership of Juan Arévalo. He maintained that this schism occurred because of the high-handed attitude of Fabregat in not consulting other leaders of the Federación before taking action on important matters.³⁷ Carleton Beals attributed the split to the rivalry of Arévalo and Fabregat for the favor of President Machado.³⁸

Controversy raged during and after the Machado regime concerning the activities of Arévalo, Fabregat, and some of the other reformist leaders. Arévalo in particular was the target of allegations that he had collaborated with the dictatorship. However, he subsequently pointed out that he was tried by a court after the fall of Machado on charges of having collaborated with the dictator and was acquitted by a jury made up of active trade unionists, opponents of Machado.³⁹

Arévalo wrote an extensive defense of his actions during the Machado dictatorship:

The Hermandad Ferroviaria de Cuba proposed a general strike. President Machado issued a strong threat against the promoters of the strike. At this time the entire country was on the side of the president, with the sole exception of Mendieta and a few friends. . . . No one dared to stand up to him in those moments. And the Hermandad did dare to do so. Until that time we were friends of the president, but we were at the service of the Hermandad; we had to obey the orders of the Central Committee of Camaguey, whose representative in Havana I was, and we did obey the Committee and defied Machado, along with the Hermandad. At this time I was slated to leave to attend the I.L.O. conference in Geneva. I had been named to the Cuban delegation. The government gave us the money necessary for the voyage as well as our passport. The time to embark came, but the strike was starting and we could not absent ourselves at this hour. . . . The Central Committee of the Hermandad was jailed and I, in place of going to Geneva, was put in the Santa Clara prison.

Arévalo went on to say that after being released, he became active once again in the Central Committee of the Hermandad, was a delegate of the Woodworkers Federation and the Unión Marítima, and was a leader of the Federación Cubana and the Unión Federativa. After some time, Machado agreed once more to treat with the Hermandad, which offered assurances that the violence of the 1926 strike would not be repeated. Arévalo claimed that until the summer of 1933 the reformist labor movement attempted to stay strictly within the law and in so doing won some favorable legislation and was instrumental in having many of the more radical labor leaders released from jail.⁴⁰

In conversation with me, Arévalo claimed that the reformist leaders guided their part of the labor movement on strictly non-political lines, refusing either to support or to oppose Machado, and it was for this reason that Machado left them more or less alone.⁴¹

Finally, Arévalo pointed to the different attitudes that his group and the CNOC leaders adopted at the time of the 1933 revolutionary general strike that resulted in Machado's overthrow, when the CNOC backed the dictator and Arévalo claimed that his group had refused to do so.

The left-wing Cuban unionists then and later charged that the Arévalo group was in the service of Machado. Thus, the official history of Cuban organized labor of the Castro Communist Party said half a century later:

The FCT was not a serious force in the labor movement. . . . But its leader enjoyed in addition to monetary aid, support of the police apparatus of the dictatorship. Furthermore, after the defeat of the railroad strike in 1926, the new leadership of the Hermandad, in close union with

Arévalo, converted that organization into another bulwark of Machadoism in the labor movement.⁴²

Some commentators outside Cuba made the same argument. Thus Carleton Beals, writing shortly after the fall of Machado, called the Federación Cubana del Trabajo a "fake Machado organization" and said that Arévalo published in his periodical *Acción Socialista* pictures of Machado with captions such as "The true friend of labor." He also noted an exchange between Arévalo and Fabregat at the time they fell out in which the former accused the latter of being in the pay of the police, and Fabregat put out manifestos and leaflets with photographs of alleged letters written by Arévalo to the police, with lists of workers to be expelled or arrested.⁴³

Arévalo's exoneration after the fall of Machado, together with the fact that he continued to have some appreciable influence within the labor movement, enough that the Communists found it convenient to work with him in the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba in the late 1930s and early 1940s, would seem to indicate that he and some of those associated with him were not guilty of much of what they were charged with. They headed two of the largest of the country's unions in the Machado period—the railroaders and maritime and port workers—and perhaps they felt that a nonconfrontational posture vis-à-vis the Machado regime was the best way to prevent an all-out attempt by the dictatorship to destroy these unions.

THE CRISIS OF THE MACHADO DICTATORSHIP

By the beginning of 1933 the economic and political situation of Cuba was in a state of major crisis. The Great Depression had struck the Cuban economy with particular severity, and the patience of the island's populace for the tyranny of Gerardo Machado was being exhausted.

The long-enduring difficulty of the sugar industry, dating from right after World War I, had been greatly aggravated by the depression. In an attempt to cut the world supply of sugar and keep up the price, Machado had decreed a 40 percent decline in the Cuban harvest of 1932–1933. This had intensified the economic crisis.

The workers and peasants of Cuba bore the greatest burden of the impact of the Great Depression on Cuba. Russell Porter reported in the *New York Times* in February 1933 on the economic situation at that time:

Reports from reliable sources in the provinces outside of Havana tell of even greater sacrifices by the people in the rural districts than in the capital. Although the agricultural populace in Cuba can sustain life on a small wage, it must have a few months' work in a year to obtain rare necessities. . . . In the present emergency the sugar planters are unable, because of their own financial troubles, to supply anything like a normal amount of employment, and are unable to pay those they do employ a sufficient living wage, with the result that the workers, being underpaid, are underfed and underclothed and their vitality is being reduced.

But the urban population did little better than those in the countryside. Porter wrote that "the President, finding that new foreign loans were impossible to obtain, had to stop most of his public works building program, which to a large extent had offset the effects of the depression that began in Cuba with the fall of sugar prices in 1925. Thousands of men were thrown out of work by this cessation of building."

Porter continued:

These dismissals were followed in 1931 and 1932 by the dismissals of thousands of government employees in every department except the army and the national police, causing more discontent. Many of these employees had not received their pay for months, and have still not received it. . . . All these contractions in government payments diminished the purchasing power of the population and, added to the fall in sugar prices and tax and customs increases, led to lower wages in private business, reduction in business activity, decreased imports from the United States and a lower standard in general social conditions.⁴⁴

However, not only the economic situation had turned against Machado: so had domestic politics, and the international situation. Many old-line politicians had joined the opposition and some at least were certainly plotting against the regime.

Perhaps most significantly, the new government of the United States led by Franklin D. Roosevelt, which came to power on March 4, 1933, quickly decided that something would have to be done to force Gerardo Machado out of power in Cuba. Roosevelt sent Sumner Welles as the U.S. ambassador to Havana to bring his removal to pass.

THE AUGUST 1933 GENERAL STRIKE AND THE CNOC-CP DEAL WITH MACHADO

The final crisis of the Machado regime began with what at first appeared to be a relatively innocuous strike on July 25, 1933, of the bus drivers of Havana, provoked by a threatened wage decrease. On July 29, however, the walkout was joined by the trolley

car workers and taxi drivers, followed soon afterward by the port workers and railroaders. On August 4, the capital's newspapers were closed down. The strike had also begun to spread all over the island, as a revolutionary walkout against the Machado regime.

Meanwhile, on August 3, the Communist Party had issued a call for a general strike, calling for the overthrow of Machado and the establishment of a "Soviet government of Workers and Peasants." This document was as vitriolic in its denunciation of Machado's opponents as of him. While praising the "United Front of the masses against the economic offensive, the terror and imperialist war," it also cried, "Down with the reformist, anarchist and police leaders who sell out and sabotage the struggle! Down with Machado and the leaders of the bourgeois-landlord opposition!"⁴⁵

President Machado finally understood the gravity of the strike crisis and on August 5 declared martial law throughout the country. A strike committee composed of delegates from the principal unions that had walked out then decided to declare a nationwide general strike. Machado responded to this by sending troops from Camp Columbia into the center of Havana. There were clashes with the demonstrators, which resulted in both deaths and injuries to those demonstrating. Efrén Córdova quotes the American writer Huden Strode as saying that the "strike spread like a trail of powder from one pueblo to another until it reached the smallest villages of the island."⁴⁶

On August 6, President Machado summoned a Communist Party delegation to the Presidential Palace. Rubén Martínez Villena, Joaquín Ordoqui, and Jorge Vivo went to confer with the dictator. They reached an agreement with him whereby he would ensure that all the economic demands raised by the groups that had started the walkout would be met, and promised that the CNOC and the Communist Party would be legalized; in return, the Communist Party and the CNOC would call off the general strike. Apparently none of this accord was actually put into writing.⁴⁷

On the same day that the Communist leaders met with Machado, the Party issued the "Manifesto of the Communist Party of Cuba Analyzing the Development of the Strike Movement," which denied the political nature of the general strike:

The P.C. and the C.N.O.C. declare openly to the masses that this strike is not the final strike for seizing power. It is possible that that final struggle is approaching, but the present general strike has not itself, nor can it have the objective of bringing down the feudal-bourgeois-imperialist regime, or even the government of Machado; Machado will not be brought down by strikes, but by the insurrection of the well armed masses, with rifles, with machine guns which the proletariat lacks in this moment.⁴⁸

Following a bit further on this same line of argument, the Communist Party Manifesto said:

We make this of the general strike and of the subsequent struggles, the means by which we overcome the obstacles and produce the conditions, not present today, that impede us from carrying out, for the moment, the definitively victorious insurrection of the masses against the bourgeois-feudal-imperialist power and for the establishment of a firm Worker and Peasant Soviet Government.⁴⁹

In conformity with the agreement with Machado, César Vilar, then secretary general of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, called a meeting of the CNOC Executive. That officially called off the general strike.

This move by the Cuban Communists had only been taken after consultation with the Caribbean Bureau of the Comintern, located in New York. It had given its approval for the Cuban Communists to make overtures to Machado and had sent a young Cuban, Felipe González, who had just returned from studying in Moscow, to participate in discussions of the issue with the Cuban party leadership. In that discussion most of the top party leaders supported the idea, although apparently Felipe González himself and César Vilar were opposed—although Vilar went along with the decision once it was made.⁵⁰

Of course, since the Communists and the CNOC had not been responsible for what had started as an economic strike of a particular group of workers and ballooned into a nationwide revolutionary general strike against the Machado dictatorship, they were not in a position effectively to call off the walkout. It continued in full force. Finally, on August 11, two colonels—perhaps at the instigation of Ambassador Sumner Welles and certainly with his approval—demanded that President Machado resign. The deposed president then fled into exile. Thus was consummated the first successful military coup d'état in the Republic of Cuba.

Shortly afterward, on August 13, the Communist-CNOC periodical *El Trabajador*, in the article "In the Face of the Great Combat," after noting the victories of a few workers' groups, said: "Workers: Maintain until triumph the strike firm in those places where demands have not been met. . . . Maintain the struggle until victory, and once that is achieved, organize the return to work in an organized form, creating unions, strengthening the existing ones and preparing yourselves for new and victorious struggles."⁵¹

The efforts of the Communists and the CNOC to save the dictator Machado at the last minute had obviously failed. At the time

their deal with the dictator was made, Sandalio Junco and other opponents of the Communists within the labor movement denounced the Communist deal with Machado as a betrayal, and even a half a century later, the Communists were still explaining what had impelled them to act as they had in early August 1933.

Fourteen years after the overthrow of Machado, one of the principal Communist trade union leaders, Carlos Fernandez R., admitted to me that the move had been a "political mistake" but insisted that it had been made "in good faith," and that there was no question of a "deal" that with Machado being involved. He said that the Americans were at that moment threatening to intervene, having warships mobilized for that purpose, and were suggesting that Machado quit. As a consequence, the Communist union leaders figured that it was better that a weakened Machado stay in power than that the Americans intervene. He added that the reason why the CNOC leaders fell into this political error was that they were still much influenced by anarchist ideas.⁵²

Juan Marinello, the longtime titular president of the Communist Party, and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a leader of both the original Communist Party and that of Fidel Castro, gave somewhat different, although not conflicting, explanations of the party's pact with Machado in August 1933. Marinello said, "The immaturity of the Party and the inexperience and youth of its leaders, made it commit the error of supporting President Machado, in opposition to the striking workers." Rodríguez wrote that "the Communist Party supported at the last moment the regime of Machado because of the vertical anti-Yankee position of the ruler, who personally insulted Welles and urged his immediate exit from Cuba."⁵³

Finally, the official history of the Cuban labor movement of the Castro Communist Party, published in 1985, explained the Communists' and CNOC's action by saying that they had not understood that what had started as series of localized economic walkouts had become a revolutionary strike against Machado:

This new character of the strike was not understood immediately by the leaders of the party and of the CNOC. For them, the general strike continued being the sum of isolated economic and solidarity strikes, and consequently, they believed that, if their demands were met, the strikers must return to work. They did not understand that the strike against Machado had entered into its decisive phase, or the firm disposition of the hundreds of thousands of workers not to return to work so long as Machado continued in power.

The Castro Communist writer added:

This myopia was reflected also in an erroneous conclusion that the leaders of the party reached concerning the just recognition that the substitution of Machado by a government of the bourgeois-landlord opposition would mean leaving Cuba in the state of a semi-colony and the popular masses in the same misery and slavery. Their conclusion was that, faced with the impossibility that Machado would be immediately replaced by a revolutionary government of workers, the struggle of the working class would only serve to help precisely that opposition to seize power.

This account went on.

This conclusion was profoundly false, being mechanical, not being based on a correct analysis of the dialectical development of the situation, and essentially, not taking into account that the revolutionary masses, aroused by the victory over Machado and oriented in their action by a correct policy of their Marxist-Leninist vanguard, could have assured profound changes, that is to say, the carrying out of the agrarian and anti-imperialist program for which the Communist Party had agitated and struggled since its foundation.⁵⁴

ESTABLISHMENT OF "SOVIETS" AFTER THE FALL OF MACHADO

During the sugar harvest of the spring of 1933, as we have seen, there had been a considerable number of strikes over wage and other issues. A few of those were marked by violence and even the taking over of mills and other property by the workers. However, so long as Machado remained in power, local government, the police, and nearby military units were hostile to this strike movement.

The situation changed with the overthrow of the dictatorship. In many cases, local municipal officials disappeared or were forcibly ousted by elements who had been opposed to the dictatorship of Machado. In a few incidents, the Communists participated in or even organized such local seizures of power.

With the overthrow, on September 4, of the government that had succeeded that of Machado, as the result of a coup by non-commissioned officers of the army, together with student elements, local and provincial government broke down further, and, in a number of cases, local military units, led by noncommissioned officers, sided with striking workers and with more radical political elements in the towns and even in a few cities.

It was against this breakdown of law and order that the establishment of "soviets" was undertaken by the Communists.⁵⁵ At the end of August, the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of

the Communist Party met. It issued a call for formation of local soviets. It defined a *soviet* as "an organization formed by delegates of the Strike and Struggle Committee and of revolutionary organizations and other mass organizations which accept the United Front." However, it warned, "No elements which exploit the labor of the workers can be elected to the soviets."

The Communist Party document then provided that

in areas where under the impulse of the masses the authorities and the groups which until yesterday constituted the bourgeois-landlord opposition have not succeeded in forming a new government, or where the control of the people was carried out under the direction of the Party . . . there must be organized immediately a Council of Workers, Peasants, Soldiers and Sailors (soviets), under the hegemony of the proletariat and the direction of the Communist Party and take power in its hands.

The document mentioned nine places in which this situation was considered to exist.⁵⁶

The official history of the Cuban labor movement of the Castro Communist Party said that such soviets were established in thirty-six sugar *centrales*, accounting for about 30 percent of Cuban sugar production. It noted, "In many of these places they took the railroads, the sugar companies, and extended this control to the subports, to the neighboring villages and agricultural zones."⁵⁷

This study took the soviet established at the Mabay *central* near Manzanillo in the province of Oriente as an example of the way the soviets functioned. That soviet took a number of steps. First, it declared the strike then in progress as settled on terms favorable to the strikers. It seized control of the warehouses, the refinery, and the cattle of the *central*, which provided it with funds to pay the workers who returned to their jobs and to get food for everyone in the *central*. It divided up 250 *caballerias* (8,250 acres) of land among the agricultural workers and peasants. It also established a "self defense force," which had "a modest armaments: rifles and revolvers."

The Mabay soviet also carried out cultural tasks. It established schools, and "in the union headquarters there were talks on political and social themes in which provincial and national leaders of the Communist Party participated." It likewise carried the message of the soviets to other sugar plantations.

Finally, in October, the soviet succeeded in reaching an agreement with the owners of the plantation. That accord provided for the eight-hour workday, recognition of the union, a minimum wage and payment in cash, as well as "the right of the trade union organization to designate all necessary personnel except the administrator."

Once this agreement had been reached, the Mabay soviet dissolved. The Castro Communist Party report noted that "like the soviet of Mabay, that of central Nazabal and all of the others that had their origin in the strikes for the eight hour day, wage increases and other demands, and with the termination of the strikes, the soviets ceased to exist."⁵⁸

The Castro party study raised the question as to whether the slogan of soviets had been justified. It concluded, "Neither the objective nor subjective conditions of Cuba, nor the international conditions in which the revolution developed in the period of August 1933 to March 1935, favored establishment in Cuba of a worker and peasant government in the soviet or any other form."⁵⁹ It added:

Like the international Communist movement in general—of which the PCC formed a part—the Communist Party had not freed itself yet from Lenin called "the infantile illness of leftism," common to the young Communist parties. It overestimated the rate of maturing of the revolutionary situation, overrated in an exaggerated way the objective and subjective premises of the socialist revolution and underestimated the forces of the class enemy.⁶⁰

Of course, this report at most hints at the fact that the Cuban Communists were following the policies of the Communist International that were in effect at the time and had been imposed by Stalin. The "youth" of the Cuban Communist Party had little to do with the matter.

STRIKES DURING CESPEDES INTERREGNUM

After the overthrow of Machado, a new government headed by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, descendant of the president of the First Cuban Republic (1868–1878), took office. With strong support from the United States ambassador, Sumner Welles, it was composed of traditional more or less conservative politicians. However, it was destined to remain in office only a little more than three weeks. That period was marked by widespread labor unrest.

Strikes were by no means confined to the sugar industry, which we have already noted. The Céspedes government spent considerable time and energy in trying to bring a peaceful end to walkouts in other segments of the economy.

The *New York Times* reported on August 22 that a strike of three thousand dock workers in Havana had been settled the previous day. The shipping companies had agreed not only to recognize the union, but also to establish a closed shop and accept a system whereby the dock workers were employed on a rotating list instead of competing for jobs every day. However,

port workers in several other towns on the north coast of the island remained out on strike.

The *Times* also reported that there were numerous other strikes in progress. These included stoppages by bakers, shoe workers, and streetcar operators in Havana, as well as the employees of the railroads in Oriente and Camaguey provinces.⁶¹

The prevalence of strikes during this period was a reflection of the generally militant attitude not only of workers and peasants, but also of students and middle-class elements as well. This effervescence created a quick end to the Cespedes regime, which had been so carefully crafted by Ambassador Welles.

LABOR POLICIES OF THE FIRST GRAU SAN MARTÍN REGIME

On September 4, 1933, the government of President Carlos Manuel de Céspedes was overthrown by a military revolt of non-commissioned officers, led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. The rebellious enlisted men first installed a five-person government, known as the Pentarquia, made up of university students and Professor Ramón Grau San Martín of the Medical School of the University of Havana. However, after a few days it was decided to name Grau San Martín as provisional president. He governed with a cabinet, the most important members of which were the student Antonio Guiteras, who was minister of government (interior), and former Sergeant Batista, by then a colonel, as minister of defense.

The program of the Grau San Martín government was socially oriented and nationalist. Efrén Córdova noted the prolabor policies of the regime, which

established the eight-hour day maximum "for all kinds of occupations," recognized the legitimacy and functions of the unions, provided for a minimum wage for sugar workers, created the Secretariat of Labor, extended the application of the law on labor accidents, recognized the right to strike, including solidarity strikes, revalidated and made effective the prohibition of payment of wages in vouchers or tickets, and promulgated the "law of 50" to 80 percent.

This last law provided that at least 50 percent of all employees of all firms had to be native Cubans.⁶²

The "50 percent law" was the most controversial of the labor measures of the Grau San Martín revolutionary government. We have noted the long-standing tendency of employers in the tobacco industry to name young Spaniards as apprentices, thus opening the way for them to the best paid positions in that indus-

try. We have also seen the massive importation of Jamaicans and Haitians to work in the sugar industry during World War I. Both of these practices had stimulated large-scale discontent in native Cuban workers, which the Grau government measure was designed to assuage. However, it also met strong criticism from the ranks of the immigrant workers, and during the Grau regime and for some years thereafter, the Communist Party and the CNOC were particularly vocal in their opposition to the 50 percent law. Half a decade was to pass before the Communist-controlled trade unions came around to support the measure.⁶³

The nationalist orientation of the Grau San Martín regime was shown not only in the 50 percent law but in its "intervention" in the United States-owned Cuban Electric Company, the suspension of payment on a debt that the Machado regime had contracted with the National City Bank, and the temporary seizure of the holdings of the Cuban American Sugar Company.⁶⁴

Minister of Government Antonio Guiteras was particularly friendly to the labor movement. Typical of his actions was his intervention in a strike of the employees of the Cuban Telephone Company at the end of November. On his insistence, the company signed an agreement with the union that provided for "recognition of the union, the establishment of a forty-five hour week and fifteen-day vacations with pay." According to the *New York Times*, Guiteras had told the employers that "they would be compelled to recognize the union."⁶⁵

THE CNOC AND THE GRAU SAN MARTÍN REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

In spite of the prolabor attitude and actions of the Grau San Martín revolutionary government, the Communist Party and the segment of the Cuban organized labor movement that it controlled did not support that regime. The official history of Cuban organized labor of the Castro Communist Party noted:

With the simplistic judgment on the government of Grau, and particularly of Guiteras, not only was it not possible for the party to have an attitude of support of that government while combating at the same time its vacillations toward imperialism and its repressive actions against the workers, but it was also not possible to bring about a national anti-imperialist front in which would participate figures such as Guiteras, and even less, like Grau. The Party understood that the policy of the united anti-imperialist front was realizable, essentially, only on the base of the masses. With the *leftist* policy it became, naturally, very difficult for such a wide front to be created in the year 1933.⁶⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

What this does not say is that the policy followed by the Cuban Communist Party (and the unions it controlled) was in strict conformity with the "line" of the Communist International at that time. According to that "Third Period" position, groups such as those determining the policies of the Grau regime were "social fascists" and therefore were to be violently attacked.

A more or less typical attack of the Communists and the CNOC on the Grau san Martín regime was a Manifesto of the CNOC on September 10, 1933. It proclaimed that

the so-called Revolutionary Junta is a bourgeois-latifundist government which at the same time that it employs its demagogic "revolutionary" language, employs machine guns against worker demonstrations and detains workers because they distribute manifestos of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, and is a government serving Yankee imperialism, before which it has bowed from the first moment of its existence, recognizing the enormous and heavy debt of the bankers of Wall Street.⁶⁷

In the closing days of the Grau regime, the Communist-controlled faction of the Cuban labor movement held two important congresses. One of these was the Fourth Congress of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba; the other was the Third National Conference of the CNOC's sugar workers organization, the SNOIA.

The CNOC Congress began on January 12, 1934, and continued through January 16. There were some 2,400 delegates, who claimed to represent more than 400,000 members. The session reviewed the history and accomplishments since the CNOC's foundation in 1925. According to the Castro Communist Party's account, the Congress

underscored the experience and lessons of the struggle of the CNOC for the consolidation and the unity of its revolutionary unions; against the anarchosindicalist leftovers and the corrupting and paralyzing action of the reformists; for the organization of the unemployed and the solution of the problem of unemployment; for the rights of youth, of women and the discriminated-against Negro masses; for the improvement of conditions of life and labor of the workers; against the offensive of the exploiting classes, of the Machado tyranny and North American imperialism; against the effects of the capitalist economic crisis started in 1929; against the imperialist war in gestation and for the defense of the USSR, etcetera.⁶⁸

Several of the resolutions and decisions of the CNOC Congress are particularly worthy of mention. In terms of organization, the meeting went on record as in favor of establishment of single unions in each factory and the merger of existing craft unions. It

also resolved to establish twenty-seven national industrial unions and fifty-one regional federations.⁶⁹

The congress adopted new statutes for the CNOC. These discarded the provision in the original statutes that had forbidden anyone from holding office in the organization who "carries on active propaganda in political parties." The resolution on the new statutes proclaimed: "The 'apoliticism' preached by the anarcho-syndicalists leads the proletariat to inaction and its submission to other bourgeois-latifundist parties. The Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba has replaced its old principles of 'Apoliticism' with the politics of the proletarian class."⁷⁰

The congress adopted two apparently contradictory motions with regard to the unity of the labor movement. On the one hand, it declared that "all our organizational work must be based on the application of the widest united front, that unites in struggle all those workers, in their place of work, organized and unorganized, without discrimination of trade union or political ideology to defend their immediate interests." On the other hand, "the congress ratified the line carried out by the CNOC of strengthening the work of Revolutionary Opposition in reformist unions, attempting to attract to those groups the largest possible number of workers of different political currents and affiliation, to guarantee the united front from below."⁷¹

The Communist orientation and control of the CNOC were clear at the Fourth Congress, which declared that "the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba must not hide the fact that it has a close relationship with the Communist Party, as the most advanced part of the proletarian class."⁷²

The congress also

expressed the firm position of the labor movement against imperialist war and in defense of the USSR. . . . With the objective of aiding the development of revolutionary and internationalist consciousness among the worker masses, the congress agreed to carry on a systematic campaign of popularization of the great successes of the Soviet Union in socialist construction, in the constant improvement of the conditions of life and labor of the workers and its unbreakable policy of peace.⁷³

It also ratified affiliation of the CNOC with the Red International of Labor Unions and the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana.⁷⁴

The Third Conference of the Sindicato Nacional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera met on January 15-16, 1934. There were reported to be delegates from 103 sugar mills as well as from "numerous" plantations and other centers associated with the sugar industry.

This conference passed in review the sugar strikes that had taken place during 1933. It estimated that something like 200,000 workers had taken part in these walkouts, and that they included not only mill workers but also those involved in harvesting and transporting the cane. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of recruiting the latter type of workers into the unions and paying special attention to their problems.

The conference also dealt at length with the problems created by the government restriction of the size of the sugar harvest and launched a call for "a free harvest" in the 1934 season. It was argued that crop restriction was mainly in the interest of "Yankee imperialism."⁷⁵

THE NON-COMMUNIST LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE GRAU SAN MARTÍN PERIOD

The Communists and the CNOC by no means had monopoly control of the Cuban labor movement during the Grau San Martín revolutionary government. This was the case not only in Havana, but in some provincial cities as well, and even among the sugar workers.

In Havana, the Federación Obrera de La Habana, which had been founded just after World War I and had taken the lead in establishing the CNOC, was by this time under the leadership of a combination of Trotskyists and some Socialists and members of the Partido Aprista. Its principal leader was Sandalio Junco, who had been one of the CNOC delegates to the founding congress of the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana in Montevideo in 1925. He had subsequently gone to Europe, including the Soviet Union, and had been won over to Trotskyism by the Spanish Trotskyist leader Andrés Nin. On returning home, he had been expelled from the Communist Party in 1932, whereupon he had led in the establishment of a Trotskyist party, the Partido Bolchevique-Leninista.⁷⁶

The Federación Obrera de La Habana (FOH) still had a majority of Havana trade unions in its ranks, and the Communists had taken those that they controlled out of the organization, to establish the Federación Regional Obrera de La Habana, which was officially recognized as the Havana branch of the CNOC at its Fourth Congress.⁷⁷

There was a counterpart of the FOH in Santiago de Cuba, also under Trotskyist control.⁷⁸ These two groups supported the government of President Grau.⁷⁹

The reformist elements that had existed since the birth of the labor movement in Cuba also continued to control a substantial

part of the labor movement. This included *Hermanidad Ferroviaria*, as well as most of the craft unions, which Efrén Córdova estimated numbered between 450 and 500.⁸⁰

Some important unions in this period were reportedly controlled by the ABC, a revolutionary group that had used terror tactics against the Machado dictatorship and had emerged for a while after the tyrant's fall as an important political group. The Communists accused it of being "fascist," although its influence in organized labor would seem to cast doubt on that categorization. In 1933-1934 it was said to control the electrical and telephone workers' unions.⁸¹

Finally, the anarchists still had some influence in the labor movement. Of them, Efrén Córdova said, "There were before any others, the anarchosindicalist groups whose importance had diminished but were not to be disdained in spite of the fact that documents of the CNOC were accustomed to refer to the 'remainders' of this tendency."⁸²

Some of the non-Communist unions were particularly favored by the Grau government and particularly by Antonio Guiteras. Such was the case of the union of workers in the United States-owned *Compañía de Electricidad*. When the government "intervened" against that company, taking control (for the time being at least) from its owners, a committee of union members was set up to help administer it. That committee recommended substantial reductions in electric rates, a recommendation that was accepted by Guiteras. Mario Riera Hernández said that it was that development that gave rise to the Federation of Electrical Workers, which was to become one of the country's most important unions.⁸³

Non-Communist unions were not confined to the major cities. Barry Carr has noted of the sugar workers:

Numbers of unions at mills in Oriente province, especially those who were members of the *Unión Obrera de Oriente* and *Sindicato Regional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera de la Region de Guantánamo*, were opposed to the SNOLA/CNOC. Libertarian and anarchist sentiment was substantial enough in the centrales and sugar field to support a meeting in Ciego de Avila on December 31, 1933 and plans to establish a national sugar workers' union opposed to the CNOC/SNOLA.⁸⁴

Events during the Grau San Martín revolutionary regime were significant for the future of the labor movement because they saw the beginnings of elements that were to be the principal contenders with the Communists for control of the labor movement in the late 1930s and the two following decades. After the fall of the Grau regime, the elements controlling the *Federación Obrera de*

La Habana were to join the political party Joven Cuba, which was founded by Antonio Guiteras, and after his death in 1935 joined the Partido Revolucionario Cubana (Auténtico), the new party established by the former President, Ramón Grau San Martín. By the late 1930s, the Auténticos were the largest group within organized labor that opposed the Communists. Eusebio Mujal, who was to become the leader of the Auténtico labor faction, was already emerging in 1933 as Sandalio Junco's principal lieutenant.⁸⁵

The second element in the later opposition to the Communists were the so-called independents, that is, those not affiliated with any particular party. One of the principal leaders of that group was Angel Cofiño. Mario Riera Hernández has said that Cofiño got his start as a principal leader of the Federation of Electrical Workers during the Grau San Martín government of 1933-1934.⁸⁶

LABOR STRUGGLES AFTER THE FALL OF GRAU SAN MARTÍN

The Communists and CNOC were not the only enemies of the Grau San Martín revolutionary government. The U.S. administration was its sworn foe. Ambassador Sumner Welles and his successor, Jefferson Caffery, made little secret of their opposition to and disdain for the revolutionary regime and finally convinced Colonel Fulgencio Batista to get rid of it. On January 15, 1934, he carried out a coup d'état that overthrew President Grau; after a very short interregnum in which Carlos Hevia and Carlos Márquez Sterling each served as president for little more than a day, on January 18 Batista installed Carlos Mendieta as provisional president. Mendieta, onetime colonel in the Second War for Independence, was a traditionalist politician who had joined the opposition to the Machado regime in the late 1920s. With the overthrow of Grau San Martín, effective power was in the hands of Colonel Batista, where it remained for more than a decade.

In the months after taking office, President Mendieta issued a number of decrees concerning organized labor. One legalized collective bargaining and provided procedures of conciliation and arbitration for such negotiations. Another specified that strikes could be declared illegal if those procedures had not been used. A third prohibited unionization of government employees and denied them the right to strike. There was also enacted a sweeping "Law in Defense of the Republic," which, among other things, forbade agitation to change the existing form of government, provided severe penalties for unions that did not adhere to the government's collective bargaining processes, and banned presentation of new demands for six months after conclusion of a strike.

The government was authorized to deport foreigners who advocated a change in the form of Cuban government or who acted so as to "curb the right to work of employers and workers."

Other legislation dealt with working conditions. Three decree laws provided a certain degree of stability of employment for workers and the right to fifteen days' vacation a year and regulated the work of women and children. The Mendieta government also ratified several International Labor Organization accords.⁸⁷

In spite of the mixed nature of the Mendieta government's labor legislation, most of the labor movement regarded that regime as hostile to organized labor. In any case, the economic crisis continued, providing the same reasons for strikes as had existed in 1933.

Strikes were numerous. The Communist leader Joaquín Ordoqui claimed that between the overthrow of Grau and the general walkout of March 1935, there were some eighteen hundred strikes.⁸⁸ At the inception of the Mendieta regime these were especially prevalent among the sugar workers, and United States-owned enterprises were particularly involved. In the case of a walkout at the Preston installation of the United Fruit Company, the strikers were attacked by two hundred soldiers, and there were severe casualties. In that case, too, United States Marines were landed "to protect American property."⁸⁹

By the middle of 1934 there were a considerable number of trade union leaders who were in jail as the result of strike activities. In July some 10,000 workers of various groups, including textile, cigarette, petroleum, and printing trades workers, were on strike demanding release of these prisoners.⁹⁰

On two occasions, the CNOC called for a general strike. The first of these instances was on February 7, when the Federación Regional Obrera de La Habana, the Havana affiliate of the CNOC, called such a walkout. In that case, there was strong opposition from the older Federación Obrera de La Habana, controlled by Trotskyists and other non-Stalinist or anti-Stalinist elements, as well as from the Hermandad Ferroviaria, and the walkout was far from being general.⁹¹ The second general strike call by the CNOC was issued for October 8, 1934, with demands for unemployment insurance and an end to the "terror," and in solidarity with several partial strikes that were then under way.⁹²

However, although the FOH and other groups opposed the efforts of the Communist Party and the CNOC to launch general strikes, they also had a considerable role in the wave of walkout that did take place in 1934. One of the most publicized strikes of the Federación Obrera de La Habana was sometimes called the "Ten Cent Strike." This was a walkout in August 1934 of employ-

ees of commercial establishments in Havana, including the Woolworth's "Five and Ten Cent Stores." This was the first time these workers had been generally organized.⁹³

In spite of the limited success of the CNOC's attempt in February 1934 to launch a general strike, a major labor crisis developed in the following month. The U.S. magazine *Current History* noted, "strike conditions in Cuba, which bordered on civil war at the beginning of March." The Mendieta government responded to the situation by arresting eighty "labor agitators" on March 5 and on March 9 decreed the legal dissolution of all unions "that were then defying the 'special emergency' law of February 10, which authorized the government to terminate all strikes 'endangering the nation.'" The government also suspended all constitutional guarantees for a period of ninety days. By the middle of the month this particular crisis had passed with the return to work of many of the striking groups."⁹⁴

One strike in 1934 was of particular significance. This was the walkout of 6,000 employees of the Ministry of Communications, which lasted from August 11 to August 29. This was important for at least two reasons: because it occurred among government workers even though they had been forbidden by the Mendieta government to organize, let alone go on strike; and because it received backing from a wide range of other workers. There were sympathy strikes by various worker groups, transport workers gave strikers free passage on their vehicles, barbers gave them free haircuts. The strikers were demanding job security, seniority pay, reestablishment of wages at 1929 levels, and several other improvements in working conditions. They also demanded removal of administrative employees who had been too closely associated with the Machado regime and the freeing of some workers who had been arrested for trade union activities.

The government did its utmost to break the strike. They used civilian strikebreakers, as well as some army telegraphists, arrested strike leaders, and took other measures of reprisal against the workers. However, because of the skills of many of those on strike, which made them hard to replace, and because of the wide popular support for the walkout, the government finally gave in. An agreement between the ministry and the strike committee acceded to most of the workers' demands, including de facto union recognition.⁹⁵

One characteristic of the labor situation of 1934 was the bitter rivalry between the Communists and CNOC, on the one hand, and their opponents in the trade union movement on the other. This conflict sometimes became violent. Thus, on August 27, an armed group emerged from the headquarters of the CNOC and

went to attack the headquarters of the Federación Obrera de La Habana, resulting in one death and injury of several people.⁹⁶

In spite of the continuing economic crisis and the political and labor turbulence, collective bargaining and the signing of labor-management agreements made some headway in this period. One of the most important of these was a collective contract signed in May 1934 between the Federación Sindical de Plantas Eléctricas and the United States-owned Compañía Cubana Electricidad. It contained forty clauses dealing with union recognition and the union shop, promotion procedures, seniority provisions in case of layoffs, vacations, sick pay, a minimum wage of sixty pesos a month, and provisions concerning the length of the workweek. Efrén Córdova noted, "It is probable, however, that this agreement was not representative of what it was then possible to obtain from less wealthy firms."⁹⁷

THE GENERAL STRIKE OF MARCH 1935

What developed into the revolutionary general strike of March 1935 began with a walkout of both teachers and students in the nation's public schools in February, demanding not only the greater financial support for the schools, but also resumption of democracy. By February 25, the *New York Times* reported that 4,000 teachers and 100,000 students had abandoned the classrooms. They were joined by students of the University of Havana, who began a campaign to convert the movement into a general strike.⁹⁸

Efrén Córdova described the spread of the walkout across the island:

Like the case of the strike of August 1933, the movement thus started served as the trigger for people to express their opposition to the government, this time that of Mendieta. . . . One after another, unions and masses of workers were joining the protest without the need for slogans or exhortations. It was an unrestrainable impulse from the bottom to the top that forced the adhesion of the most diverse organizations and was taking on the characteristic of popular uprising.⁹⁹

Finally, on March 9, the CNOC called for a general strike. However, this occurred only after the movement had become one in fact. Both the CNOC and the Communist Party had felt that the movement was "premature" and certainly could not lead to the "workers and peasants government" that they were seeking. They also undoubtedly were hesitant to join a movement that was getting its principal political impetus from the ABC revolutionary organization.¹⁰⁰

The reaction of the Mendieta government and particularly Colonel Batista, the army commander, was ferocious, substantially more drastic than had been President Machado's response to the general strike two years before. The constitution was suspended and martial law was declared in Havana; soldiers occupied the University of Havana, which was closed, as it would remain for almost three years. Colonel José E. Pedraza was named military governor of Havana under the martial law regime there.

Efrén Córdova described the government's reaction to this strike:

Pedraza began immediately a bloody campaign of repression that had no precedents in the agitated history of the country. Well-known leaders of the strike were taken from their homes and assassinated. A great number of union headquarters were assaulted and the archives destroyed. Many public employees were jailed or dismissed in summary form. The special courts did not cease dictating condemnatory sentences against the strikers. The armed forces occupied all the vital sectors of the economy and once in control of them proceeded to operate them directly, using strikebreakers and forcing the employees to work.¹⁰¹

The U.S. magazine *Current History* said after the strike was over that "sober estimates" placed the number of workers who had participated in the work stoppage at 500,000 and added that "included in this number were practically all the school teachers of the island, about 50,000 government employees, all varieties of labor unions from the most respectable to those of the extreme left, the bulk of the ABC, the leaders of the Auténtico group and the various groups of radicals on the Left fringe."

Current History's report on the March 1935 strike concluded: "The record is clear. The Cuban Government won by an appeal to force and by measures as violent as any used by Machado. Labor unions have been broken up and their funds confiscated. Many of the ablest and most patriotic leaders of the island have been jailed or forced to flee. It does not augur well for peaceful elections in the near future."¹⁰²

AFTERMATH OF THE MARCH 1935 GENERAL STRIKE

The suppression of the March 1935 general strike underscored the fact that Cuba was being governed by a military dictatorship headed by Colonel Fulgencio Batista. Although at the end of the year "elections" were held and subsequently Miguel Mariano Gómez was installed as "constitutional president," he was ousted by Batista a few months later when he had the audacity to veto a bill backed by the dictator providing for establishment

in rural areas of schools run by members of the armed forces. He was succeeded by Federico Laredo Bru.

A December 1936 article in the *New York Times* described the nature of this regime: "The Cuban army, built up from 5,000 to 22,000 during the past three years, must be reckoned with not merely as an instrument of force but also as a powerful political force. Added to this is the military reserve of about 40,000 men and women reservists who, with relatives and friends, constitute a political nucleus of considerable importance."

The article continued:

Shrewdly realizing that it is difficult to control the people indefinitely through the sheer force of arms, Colonel Fulgencio Batista, the army chief has set about to popularize himself and the armed forces by the greatest publicity campaign ever staged in Cuba. A special department in the army pours out an unending stream of propaganda through movies, books and pamphlets to the soldiers. The propaganda condemns all forms of radicalism and eulogizes the efficiency of a military-controlled government and the duty of the army to regiment the people for the good of the nation. More propaganda extolling the army's activities is loosed through the controlled press.¹⁰³

The Cuban workers were a particular target of both repression and propaganda. Large numbers of trade unionists were jailed, and a considerable number lost their lives. Also, as the official labor history of the Castro Communist Party recorded:

Many trade union headquarters were destroyed, robbed of their funds, and possessions by the police and the army; others occupied by members of the "reserve," establishing military control of the workers' organizations. The railroads were militarized; in firms, factories and public offices there were placed military supervisors who spread terror and with whose approval there were reductions in personnel. . . . Thousands of workers, teachers and public employees who had been distinguished in past struggles were thrown out of work.

This study noted that this persecution was not confined to the CNOC and its affiliates but was leveled against all factions of the labor movement, including tobacco workers, the Hermandad Ferroviaria, and the electric workers federation, which were not Communist-controlled.¹⁰⁴

In January 1936, a "labor exchange law" was decreed, providing that all workers must register with a labor exchange, providing their photograph, fingerprints, list of employers, and reasons for discharge in the previous five years. Those failing to do so were to be subject to imprisonment.¹⁰⁵

As late as February 1937, the *New York Herald Tribune* reported:

Cuba's military rulers are sifting the country for agitators in an anti-radical drive that may not be halted until the ranks of organized labor have knuckled under the control of the Army. For the first time in the republican history of the island, officers of general staff headquarters have been assigned to the Labor Department. . . . The two officers are . . . expected to speed up the Army's relentless campaign against radicals, a campaign begun with what is tantamount to a demand for the co-operation of commercial and industrial leaders through a military circular letter marked "confidential."

That letter said:

I request that as soon as possible you provide this office (staff headquarters) with a confidential report of all employees at your disposition, including therein: full names, age, nationality, civil state, race, profession, home address and names of parents; as well as any available information concerning their antecedents; and, if possible, photographs of workers who have shown themselves to be agitators.¹⁰⁶

An important event also took place outside Cuba that was soon to have a very significant impact on Cuban politics and the Cuban organized labor movement. This was the drastic change in the "line" of the Communist International, which was formally ratified at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935. This change abandoned the Third Period policy of Communist isolation from and bitter enmity toward all other left-wing political groups and union movements controlled by them, in favor of the so-called popular front policy of alignment with them, and even with more conservative elements that proclaimed themselves "antifascist."

A curious result of this change, insofar as Cuba was concerned, was an article by César Vilar, head of the CNOC, who had gone into exile in the United States, that appeared in a New York Socialist newspaper in December 1936. It recorded that "the National Cuban Federation of Labor issued and distributed widely a special bulletin containing all resolutions sent by the Executive Council of the A.F.L., many of its International and National Unions, the British Unions and others in favor of Cuban labor, to the President, Dr. Gómez, and to Colonel Fulgencio Batista. Many brothers were jailed for distributing this bulletin." The article added, "Today, stimulated with the valuable support of the A.F.L. we shall increase our resistance and tenacity in spite of greater sacrifices."¹⁰⁷

In spite of the considerable persecution to which it was subjected, the Cuban labor movement continued to exist, and even grew somewhat between 1937 and 1938. Efrén Córdova noted that the number of legally registered unions grew from 558 in the former year to 621 in the latter, and membership increased from 170,000 to 220,000. Córdova also noted that "little by little some of the dissolved federations were beginning to be reconstituted, beginning in 1937 with the Federación de Trabajadores Marítimos, the next year with that of transport and a little later four industrial federations and various regional ones."¹⁰⁸

The CNOC continued to function illegally to some degree. As early as July 1935 it held a plenum meeting, attended by delegates from five regional federations "and some confederated unions." The Communist tobacco workers' leader, Lázaro Peña, was chosen as the new secretary general of the CNOC.¹⁰⁹

There were also some efforts to reunite the labor movement on a regional and national scale. Thus, in September 1935 a Comité de Enlace de Colectividades Obreras was organized in the city of Havana, and in 1937 a Comité de Unificación Obrera de la Provincia de La Habana was organized with a view to establishing a united labor group in that province, with the possibility later of setting up a united national labor group.

Efrén Córdova noted:

In spite of the modest objectives and limited jurisdiction, the committees mentioned had the important distinction of having been constituted jointly by reformists and revolutionaries. Such coexistence of trade unionists that previously had been generally situated in opposing positions was a positive signal for the reunification of the labor movement.¹¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The decade from 1925 to 1935 had seen the development of a militant Cuban national labor movement. For the first time, there existed a nationwide central labor organization, the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba, as well as a number of important national industrial unions and regional federations. For the first time, too, the workers of the country's largest economic sector, the sugar workers, had been unionized to a substantial degree.

During most of this period, the Communist Party had been the most powerful single political element active in the labor movement. However, there remained substantial remnants of an-archosindicalist influence, as well as that of the so-called reformist elements. Near the end of the period there appeared what, in the form of the Auténticos, was to become the major competitor of the

Communists for influence in organized labor in the subsequent period.

During this decade, the labor movement was confronted with two ferocious dictatorships, those of President Machado and Colonel Batista. Organized labor was largely responsible, finally, for bringing down the first of these, but failed in its efforts to dethrone the second. However, both dictators became aware of the dangers of trying to destroy the labor movement—Machado learning the lesson too late, Batista, as events in the next decade would show, being more successful in learning the lesson that more was to be gained by efforts to domesticate organized labor than by attempts to destroy it.

Efrén Córdova has well summed up the situation of organized labor after the 1925–1935 decade:

A certain languor overtook the large nuclei of workers, some exhausted and others disheartened after various years of almost continued agitation. . . . The physical elimination of some leaders and the jailing of many trade unionists also generated fear and the inclination of many to abstain. But the decapitation of trade unionism and the disheartening of some workers did not in any way signify the extinction of the labor movement. For one thing, the conditions of life and work of the working population continued being critical in 1935. . . . For another, the trade union spirit remained latent in large groups of workers who were conscious of the need for an organization and remembered the great tradition of solidarity that had been manifest in Cuba during more than sixty years.¹¹¹

NOTES

1. Efrén Córdova, *Clase Trabajadora y Movimiento Sindical en Cuba, Volumen I (1819–1959)*, Ediciones Universal, Miami, 1995, pages 142–145; *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano 1865–1958, Tomo I, 1865–1935*, Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba anexo al Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Editoria Política, La Habana, 1985, pages 225–228; Evelio Tellería, *Los Congresos Obreros en Cuba*, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1984, pages 146–198.

2. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., pages 248–249.

3. Ibid., pages 190–194.

4. Ibid., pages 194–195.

5. Ibid., pages 228–229.

6. Ibid., pages 230–233; see also Córdova, op. cit., pages 130–132.

7. Córdova, op. cit., page 132.

8. Jorge García Montes and Antonio Alonso Avila, *Historia del Partido Comunista de Cuba*, Ediciones Universal, Miami, 1970, page 65.

9. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo I*, op. cit., page

249.

10. Córdova, op. cit., pages 151-153.
11. *International Press Correspondence*, periodical of Communist International, December 22, 1927.
12. *CTC*, magazine of Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, Havana, September 1944, interview with José Rego.
13. Juan Arévalo, *Nuestras Actividades Sindicales en Relación con el General Machado y Su Gobierno*, Ediciones de Acción Socialista, Havana, 1947, page 3.
14. Córdova, op. cit., page 150.
15. *Ibid.*, page 150; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 242.
16. Córdova, op. cit., page 151; and *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 243.
17. *New York Times*, February 6, 1933.
18. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., page 257.
19. Barry Carr, "Sugar and Soviets: The Mobilization of Sugar Workers in Cuba-1933," paper prepared for the Tenth Latin American Labor History Conference, Duke University, April 23-24, 1993, page 16.
20. *El Movimiento Revolucionario Latino Americano*, Report of the First Conference of Latin American Communist Parties, Buenos Aires, 1929, page 229.
21. Moisés Poblete Troncoso, *El Movimiento Obrero Latinoamericano*, Fondo de Cultura Mexico, D.F., 1946, page 195.
22. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo I, op. cit., pages 256-258.
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The Early Years of the CTC

The crisis in the Cuban labor movement provoked by the failure of the revolutionary general strike of March 1935 lasted for something more than a year. During that period many of the leaders of the outlawed Confederación Nacional Obrera Cubana and other important union groups remained in jail, in hiding, or in exile, although the CNOC was able to hold a clandestine Fourth Plenum meeting in July 1935.¹ Many union headquarters were closed down by the authorities, and collective bargaining was virtually at a standstill.

Two factors brought about a change in this situation, starting in 1936. One of these was a drastic change in the line of the Communist Party, and consequently of the part of the labor movement under its control. The other was an alteration in the attitude and policies of Colonel Fulgencio Batista, and hence of the government he dominated.

Of course, the change in the position of the Communist Party did not originate in Cuba; it was part of the worldwide policy shift of the Communist International, which began to appear in 1934 with the establishment of a "united front" between the French Communist Party and the Socialist Party, whom the Stalinists had until a few weeks before denounced as "social fascists." This profound alteration in outlook and action found formal ratification at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in August–September 1935, which endorsed the establishment of "popular fronts" by each national Communist Party, that is, electoral and other alliances with all parties proclaiming themselves antifascist. The Seventh Congress also endorsed abandonment of the "Third Period" policy whereby each national Communist Party

had a trade union movement it dominated, urging instead the merger of the Communist-run union groups with others of different political orientation, a process that in fact the Comintern had already started to put into practice.

One can only speculate on the causes of the change in policy of Colonel Batista. It seems likely that, at least that early in his career, he did not want to go down in Cuban history as "another Machado." Of humble origins, and himself a mulatto, he undoubtedly had a belief in the need for social and economic change in Cuba, as well as a desire to gain support, if not popularity, among his humbler fellow citizens.

Whatever his motives, Batista began to modify his dictatorship. Elections were held in December 1935, as a result of which Miguel Mariano Gómez became president and Federico Laredo Bru vice president. Although a few months later Batista forced Gómez's resignation when he vetoed a law providing for establishment of a network of rural schools under control of the army, Laredo Bru filled out the rest of the term, until 1940.

The Laredo Bru government made a number of reforms, particularly in the education and health fields. But its most important measure was the *Ley de Coordinación Azucarera*, which created profound changes in the country's most important economic sector.

There were three different groups involved in the sugar industry. One consisted of large landowners (many of them still foreign firms) who, in addition to cultivating cane, controlled the sugar mills where the first phase of processing took place. The second was made up of the renters (virtually all of them Cubans), known as *colonos*, who used land belonging to the larger firms and who until 1937 were subject to losing their leases at the whim of the landowners. The third group were the wage workers, employed both in cultivating and cutting cane and in the sugar mills.

Efrén Córdova summarized the change brought about by the *Ley de Coordinación Azucarera*:

This law conferred first of all on those who cultivated the land and planted the cane the right to permanence on the fincas that they occupied, thus inflicting a severe blow on the latifundio system and the absentee owners. The law provided in addition a new method of paying wages in cutting, transport and processing of the cane, making them depend on the price of sugar. For the agricultural phase and during the harvest, the minimum wage was fixed in accordance with the official price of sugar in the fifteen days before work began. For the industrial workers, the minimum was also fixed in accordance with the price of sugar, beginning with one peso (1.00) when the price was not higher than 1.56 [cents] per pound of crude sugar on shipboard. Although the

price of sugar was not yet high, that system established the basis for an impressive increase in wages in the 1940s and 1950s. This provided, in effect, an indirect but efficacious form for participation in the profits that would open new horizons in the level of living of those who worked in the sugar sector.²

BATISTA-COMMUNIST NEGOTIATIONS

The first reaction of the Communists (and hence of the underground CNOC) to the change in Batista's policies was negative. As the official history of the Cuban labor movement of the Castro Communist Party noted:

Both the CNOC and the PC denounced Batista, saying that Batista's objective with all these promises was to change the image which our people had of Batista and his military clique, to limit the protests and growing militancy against the dictatorship and reinforce the role of the armed forces in the administration of the country, in the face of the aspirations for power of civil sectors of the dominant classes.³

The Communists and the CNOC pushed demands for their legalization, as well as for a general political amnesty and the calling of elections for a constitutional assembly. They also carried on campaigns for support of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War and in support of the radical policies of Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas.⁴

In this period of 1936-1937, the Communists, in pursuance of the new popular front line of the Comintern, sought to establish an alliance of all the parties and groups of the opposition to the Batista-controlled regime. One step in this direction was the establishment in March 1937 of a legal "front party" for the Partido Comunista, that is, the Partido Unión Revolucionario (PUR), headed by Juan Marinello and Salvador García Agüero and consisting principally of intellectuals and others not publicly associated with the Communist Party. The PUR then took the lead in trying to fuse some factions of the Auténtico Party of the former President, Ramón Grau San Martín, the local Aprista Party, and others, an effort that gave rise to the Bloque Revolucionario Popular. However, as the Communists themselves admitted, this organization "did not succeed in consolidating itself."⁵

However, further changes in Batista's policies and resistance of other opposition groups to overly close association with the Communists caused drastic alterations in the line of the Communists. They were converted from the most violent opponents of Batista, as they had been in 1935-1936, to his close allies, a transformation that became clear in 1938.

Late in 1937, President Laredo Bru decreed a general political amnesty, which covered some 4,000 people, including those who had been jailed during and after the March 1935 strike.⁶ In May 1938, the government announced its intention to call general elections for a constitutional assembly. In that same month, the government permitted the legal appearance of the "unofficial" Communist Party daily paper, *Hoy*, which at its inception had a circulation of some 80,000 copies.⁷ The government also legalized the hitherto clandestine opposition parties.⁸

During this period, there were undoubtedly negotiations in progress between the Communist Party and Batista. With the return to electoral politics, Batista certainly had set his eye on being elected president, and for this purpose he had begun to put together what came to be known as the *Coalición Socialista Democrática*. Perhaps overestimating the influence of the Communists among the voters, Batista was undoubtedly eager to gain their support for the 1940 election.

Efrén Córdova outlined the nature of the Batista-Communist negotiations: "What Batista offered the Communists was precisely what they wanted, the same things they had asked of Machado: the opportunity to participate in the political process and freedom of action to control the trade union movement."⁹

Fausto Waterman, one of the principal *Auténtico* labor leaders in the 1940s, claimed that the two most important concessions Batista made to the Communists in the 1937-1938 negotiations were legalization of their party and control of the Ministry of Labor, through which they could control the trade union movement, in part by guaranteeing legal recognition of Communist-controlled unions, including a number that were largely "paper" organizations, with little or no membership. Waterman maintained that until the exit of Batista from the presidency in 1944, the real power of the ministry was exercised by a Communist who served as "trade union delegate" there.¹⁰

As a consequence of these negotiations, the Communists' attitude toward Batista changed markedly. For instance, in the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the party in July 1938, Secretary General Blas Roca claimed that "there is taking place a process within the reaction bloc, in which Batista has commenced to carry out actions which do not correspond entirely to what the fascistic elements are demanding of him."¹¹ In that same meeting, a resolution was adopted that Batista "is no longer the focal point of reaction but the defender of democracy."¹²

A week after this Plenum, the Communist leaders Blas Roca and Joaquín Ordoqui met with Colonel Batista in the Camp Columbia barracks outside Havana. There, according to Efrén Córdova,

they reached an agreement that led to the legalization of the Communist Party two months later.¹³

UNIFICATION OF THE CUBAN LABOR MOVEMENT

While these political trends were operating, the process of rebuilding the labor movement was making marked progress. Not only were new unions being organized and recognized by the Ministry of Labor, but all of the political tendencies within the labor movement were working toward unification of organized labor and the eventual establishment of a new central labor organization that would include virtually all of the country's organized workers.

The official labor history of the Castro era Communist Party sketched this process of recuperation and reunification of the labor movement, noting

The orientation to fuse the dual unions in the clothing, shoe, manufacturing industry, food workers, tobacco and transport sectors, to struggle for the unification of different trade union organizations of chauffeurs of trucks, taxis, etc., as well as the unions of trolley-car workers of Havana, Matanzas, Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba. In this unifying effort some members of unions of the CNOC and some reformist leaders were establishing contacts, which after much effort, expanded and played a positive role.

One of the earliest and most notable examples of the Communists' abandonment of dual unionism was the decision of the Federación Sindical Regional de La Habana (of the CNOC) to enter into contact with the Federación Obrera de La Habana (controlled by ex-Trotskyites) "with a view to uniting in a single federation." At a meeting of representatives of both groups on July 19, 1935, the Committee for Free Trade Union Organization was established.¹⁴

By early 1937 the movement toward unification of the labor movement had made considerable progress. The Castro era Communist Party's official labor history noted that by then

there was a large number of unions organized in Havana as in the interior of the country, including in fields as important as transportation and the sugar industry . . . it had passed to the reorganization or organization of trade union sections in firms and industrial unions, the fusion of dual unions, and even successful work for other higher forms of organization, such as the national federations of transport, the food sector, that of textiles and clothing; in the maritime, port, tobacco and sugar sectors.

By the beginning of 1937, the Secretariat of Labor reported that there were 558 legalized unions, with 168,232 members.¹⁵

The first unification of the labor movement on a provincial basis took place in the province of Oriente. At a conference in March 1937, attended by delegates of seventy-five unions from throughout the province—both CNOC affiliates and “independent” unions—the Federación General de Trabajadores de Oriente was established.¹⁶

A year later, in March 1938, a unity congress of the organized workers of the Province of Havana was held. According to the Castro era Communist Party's official labor history, “This was the first time in the history of the Cuban labor movement that there had been joined in a single congress leaders of organizations of such ideological diversity.” The 130 unions represented at the meeting claimed 90,000 members. There was a fraternal delegate present from the National Maritime Union of the United States, and a message was read from Vincente Lombardo Toledano, secretary general of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico. The congress established the Federación de Trabajadores de la Provincia de La Habana.¹⁷

Efrén Córdova stressed the importance of the establishment of a unified labor federation in the Havana region:

The reconstitution in March of 1938 of the Federación de Trabajadores de la Provincia de La Habana served as a double “test” of the possibility of giving life to a unified central labor group authorized by the government. It was, in the first place, the result of the joint action of reformist and Communist leaders who at least on the regional level succeeded in reaching an accord. In the second place, there was no visible opposition from the government. With the way prepared shortly before by the Batista-PCC agreement, it was the turn of the national labor leaders to carry forward the moves for unification and organization necessary for giving life to a wide based central labor group that could include the various tendencies in conflict.¹⁸

THE CUBANS AT THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF CTAL

An important step toward establishment of a new Cuban central labor organization was the participation of Cuban trade union leaders in the founding conference in Mexico City of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) in September 1938. This conference, called by the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico, with the support of the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas, assembled labor leaders from most of the Latin American countries.

A Cuban delegation consisting of Communist, Auténtico, and "independent" labor leaders was present at this hemisphere meeting. They participated actively in the affairs of the Mexico City meeting. Lázaro Peña was the most important of the Communist leaders present in Mexico. Among the Auténticos were Sandalio Junco and Eusebio Mujal.¹⁹

Among its other objectives, the founding congress of the CTAL sought to encourage establishment of national central labor groups in those countries in which they did not yet exist. Among its resolutions was one pledging the new organization "to orient the constitution of wide committees which will direct the struggle for a common platform of workers demands in each country and achieve the complete unity of the working class on the national level, overcoming internal struggles." The Declaration of Principles of the CTAL stressed the need "to achieve the unification of the working class within each country."²⁰

In the spirit of these statements of the CTAL, the Cuban delegates signed what came to be called the Pact of Mexico, which proclaimed:

formally and solemnly before the representatives of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico it is our firm decision to work energetically, under the banner of the class struggle, to establish as soon as possible a national central labor group in the Republic of Cuba, pledging our word of honor as worker combatants to shortly organize and carry out in our country a National Workers Congress of Unification, as the indispensable basis to achieve the structuring of a national trade union organism, to bind together more and more the fraternal and class relations among the workers organizations of the American continent, in accordance with the postulates which we have accepted as the basis for the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, but of the entire world, combating with decision and energy all menaces to the democratic system of government and all efforts to establish, from whatever part of the world, a fascist regime, implacable enemy of the popular classes.²¹

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONFEDERACIÓN DE TRABAJADORES DE CUBA

On their return home, the Cuban delegates to the CTAL founding congress set to work to establish a new central labor organization. In this effort, they had at least the passive support of the Laredo Bru-Batista government.

This acceptance of the establishment of a new national labor confederation that would be more or less independent of the government undoubtedly reflected an evolution in the thinking and policy of Colonel Fulgencio Batista, perhaps influenced by the

forthcoming elections for a constitutional assembly, and subsequently for president, as well as by the agreement he had reached with the Communist Party. A bit less than a year before, in November 1937, the Secretariat of Labor had sought to establish a central group under its own control. A congress to that end had been held, at which the delegates had been carefully selected, and those who were clearly not willing to be unconditional supporters of the government were either denied credentials or not allowed to speak at the meeting. However, in spite of the care taken by the Secretariat, the delegates finally decided not to establish a commission to organize a central labor group, "alleging that they lacked the authority to reach such an agreement."²²

With the return of the Cuban delegates to the CTAL congress, there was formed the Comité Organizador del Congreso Obrero Nacional, to undertake the establishment of a new national central labor organization. It finally issued invitations to union groups throughout the country to send delegates to a congress in Havana from January 25 to 28, 1939. There were present 1,500 delegates representing 789 organizations. The opening session of the congress was addressed, by among others, Minister of Labor Juan M. Portuondo Domenech, CTAL President Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Mexican CTM leader Fidel Velázquez, and Joseph Kowner, representing the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the United States.

The congress performed its most important function by officially declaring the dissolution of the Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba and the formation in its place of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC). The new confederation was made up of industrial federations covering various segments of the economy, and geographical federations in each province. These federations in turn would consist of unions of individual firms, of particular trades, or of whole industries.

The CTC, as originally structured, had annual or biennial congresses as its highest authority and a national council of fifty-five people, with an executive of fifteen secretaries, each with a vice secretary, to conduct the day-to-day business of the organization. The relatively large size of the national council and national executive was necessary to give adequate representation in those bodies to the three principal ideological-political elements within the new confederation, that is, the old Communist-controlled CNOC, the onetime Trotskyist (by 1939 Auténtico Party) Federación Obrera de La Habana, and the "reformist" Federación Cubana del Trabajo.

The founding congress of the CTC passed a wide range of resolutions in addition to those creating the new organization.

These included demands for a daily minimum wage of \$1.50 for industrial workers and \$1.20 for those in agriculture; the policy that parts of the *Ley de Coordinación Azucarera* favoring the sugar workers be put fully into practice; the establishment of social security funds for workers in all branches of the economy; elimination of decrees and laws of the 1934–1936 period that limited the free functioning of unions, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. There was also a resolution calling for election of a constitutional assembly “with free and sovereign character.”²³

There was undoubtedly an effort to obtain certain political balance within the leadership of the CTC, although Communist influence was certainly most pronounced. In each of the fifteen secretariats making up the executive committee, a Communist was either secretary or vice secretary, and the other person was drawn from the *Auténticos*, the former *Federación del Trabajo de Cuba* (FTH) or new “independent” elements which had appeared in the mid-1930s.²⁴

The first secretary general of the CTC, chosen at its founding congress, was Lázaro Peña, a Communist tobacco workers leader and last secretary general of the CNOC. Efrén Córdova stressed the importance of Peña in cementing unity at the inception of the CTC:

The work of unification was made more possible by the personality of Lázaro Peña who from the first moment demonstrated a special ability to cultivate good relations with other leaders. Peña . . . was blessed with clear intelligence and possessed the political tact, capacity for dialogue and other qualities necessary to be a great trade union leader. Formed by the party, Peña was totally imbued with Marxist doctrine and knew well its objectives, but knew how to pursue them with tact and suaveness, which provided a great advantage for Communist control of the CTC.²⁵

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1940

The enactment of the Constitution of 1940 was a significant event in Cuban labor history. Following the model of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, it included a number of labor and social provisions that were of importance to the organized workers. Although some of these required further legislation, which was not always enacted, it constituted a significant advance so far as the labor movement was concerned.

The CTC played an active role before and during the constitutional assembly. It presented to that body an “exposition of the rights of the workers, which brought together the basic demands of the national proletariat which it wanted to become constitutional principles, as a guarantee of their social, political and

economic rights." During the four months that the Constitutional Assembly was functioning, the CTC mobilized public demonstrations in favor of its demands, as well as organizing letter writing campaigns for the same purpose.²⁶

Efrén Córdova sketched the importance of the new constitution for organized labor:

The programmatic precepts announced the new worker orientation of labor legislation, pointed to the goal of full employment and established the principle of social justice as a possible source of law. However, for the Cuban workers and their organizations what most interested them were the concrete accomplishments, rights and tangible benefits and not interpretations of long-term developments. And it was on that plane of immediate aspirations that the Constitution provided the greatest successes, since in addition to elevating to the rank of a constitutional principle provisions as important as the eight hour day *maximum*, it introduced other measures of effective protection of the worker, as for example: a) the 44 hour week with 48 hours' pay; b) one month of rest for every eleven of work within a normal year, a prescription which was very advanced for the period and which almost no other country of the world had yet enacted; c) paid maternity leave of six weeks preceding birth and six afterwards; d) the right of the pregnant woman to not have to do work requiring physical effort during the three months before birth; and e) the reduction of the maximum work day to six hours for minors between 14 and 18. (Emphasis in the original)

Córdova also noted other important labor provisions of the constitution: a minimum wage, exemption from legal seizure of the workers' minimum wage and working tools, equal pay for men and women and without regard to race, wages and salaries as an employer's preferential financial obligation, and weekly payment of wages and salaries.

The Constitution of 1940 also provided for the workers' right to form unions and to bargain collectively with their employers. It also recognized the workers' right to strike, as well as the employers' right to declare a lockout—the latter a provision that the unionists among the constitutional assembly delegates opposed. It likewise provided that there be adequate inspection personnel to enforce labor protective legislation.²⁷

Even the official labor history of the Castro era Communist Party recognized that the 1940 Constitution "had progressive and democratic content, expressed in articles which consecrated the principle of national sovereignty, as well as numerous social rights and political liberties."²⁸ However, it complained that "many important conquests in the constitutional text depend on complementary laws which had to be approved by the Chamber of

Representatives and by the Senate, composed in their majority of politicians corrupted in the service of the oligarchy."²⁹

On the other hand, Efrén Córdova tended to downplay the failure of Congress to act after 1940 to put into effect some pro-labor parts of the constitution:

Even though the Legislative Power was afterwards negligent in adopting the complementary laws foreseen in the Constitution, it is not true as claimed by followers of Castro and some writers in the U.S., that the advances and reforms of the Constitution existed only on paper. Apart from the norms which went immediately in effect, many others were put into effect through decree-laws, presidential decrees, agreements-laws and resolutions of general application, while for others there was no need for a new law, since there already existed adequate provisions before the Constitution.³⁰

THE CTC AND WORLD WAR II

Only a few months after establishment of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, World War II commenced. Perhaps the clearest indication of the preponderant influence of the Communists in the CTC in this period were the positions taken by the confederation with regard to that conflict.

The Second World War began on September 1, 1939, with the German invasion of Poland. Less than two weeks before that, the Stalin regime reached an accord with the Nazi government that went far beyond the "nonaggression pact" announced on August 22, including an agreement for division of Eastern Europe by the Stalin and Hitler regimes, and assured Hitler of the benevolent neutrality of the Soviet Union in whatever conflict with the Western powers might be generated by the attack on Poland.

Of course, the Stalin-Nazi Pact rendered totally inoperative the policies that the Communist International had been following for half a decade. On a national level in each country, gone was the policy of "popular front," that is, a broad alliance of all parties and groups professing opposition to fascism. Internationally, there was no more support for a political and military alliance against the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis, which the Comintern had been urging at least since 1935.

In place of popular frontism and antifascist unity on a national and an international level, the "line" of the Communist International was that the war that broke out on September 1, 1939, was an "imperialist war," a conflict to cover division of the spoils among the warring powers, the outcome of which made absolutely no difference to the workers of the world. That position

was maintained until June 22, 1941, when the Hitler regime invaded the Soviet Union.

With the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the Communist International's position changed once again, by 180 degrees. From being a conflict on June 20, 1941, in which the international working class had absolutely no interest, World War II became on June 22, 1941, a holy crusade against the Axis powers and in defense of the Soviet Union and its allies.

The Communist Party of Cuba followed totally the various shifts in Soviet and Comintern policy. The degree of Communist control of the CTC (at least on issues that were important to the Stalinists) was demonstrated by the way in which the leading organs of the Confederación endorsed the varying Communist positions on the questions involving the Second World War.

The "imperialist" nature of the war between 1939 and 1941 was spelled out in a resolution of the Third National Council meeting of the CTC in September 1940:

On the first anniversary of the war, the imperialist character of this conflict is confirmed with greater clarity as each belligerent disputes a new division of the world, the redivision of zones of influence and the subjugation of the colonial peoples. . . . Neither Germany nor Italy defends any just cause, nor does England—with the support of the United States—fight for freedom or for democracy of any people of the world. This is an unjust war, anti-popular and reactionary, as much on one side as on the other, in which the peoples are being sacrificed criminally for the benefit of their oppressors.

The resolution went on: "This is a war which is carried on by the English and Nazi-fascist imperialists for the benefit of the rich, of the arms manufacturers, the great merchants and bankers, who enrich themselves fabulously with it, while the workers suffer the greatest exploitation and are assassinated on the battle fronts or the bombings of the rear guard."

Insofar as Cuba was concerned, the September 1940 resolution proclaimed, "The Cuban workers, who are already suffering the consequences of this war without taking part in it, with the closing of factories, the paralyzation of ports, low wages, hunger and misery, do not wish our country to be involved in the inferno of barbarism, destruction and death."

The operative parts of the resolution pledged the CTC "to struggle against the imperialist war, denounce its character and the ends which are sought as much by one belligerent as the other, developing powerful national movement to assure that our country keeps out of the criminal conflict." To this end, it opposed the measure pending in Congress to establish compulsory mili-

tary service and pledged "to combat all propaganda in favor of the war."³¹

The position of the CTC experienced a 180-degree turnabout with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. In an amplified meeting of its executive committee soon after that event, a resolution that was passed proclaimed:

The war which the Nazi imperialists have launched against its people and against all peoples, with their aggression now against the Soviet Union, obliges all workers to manifest not only their sympathies with the land of socialism, but also their disposition to struggle with enthusiasm and decision for the cause that we all embrace—feeling it a duty of all men of the world—to support it in becoming victorious in the defense of its territory, for the progress and future of humanity which that symbolizes, in the face of the invasion of slavery, retrogression and barbarism which fascism signifies.³²

The CTC, in conformity with this change in attitude toward the war, changed its position with regard to obligatory military service. As the official labor history of the Castro period Communist Party stated, "The CTC also issued a warm exhortation for inscription in Obligatory Military Service and the incorporation of women in the Feminine Service for Civil Defense."³³

In conformity with this change of policy toward the war, the CTC put great emphasis on doing everything possible to prevent interference with production for the war effort. Lázaro Peña expressed this position at the Fifth National Council meeting of the CTC:

We proclaim the duty of the working class to struggle to avoid interruptions of the production necessary to win the war. The CTC, which defends resolutely the demands of the workers, which is constituted to struggle for their demands, the reason for existence of which is the need to struggle with organized and decided force against the abuses and exploitation of the employers, the CTC—in these moments of national life—proclaims the necessity of avoiding conflicts in the patriotic interest of winning the battle of production.

Peña went on:

The workers of Cuba—conscious of what the present struggle signifies—will know how to find means of defending their demands, their rights and their conquests, while avoiding at the same time conflicts which signify interruptions in production, but without that signifying for a moment, that they adopt legal measures which suppress or restrict the right to strike and other instruments of defense of the workers. . . . Only in extreme cases . . . will the workers accept to go on strike.³⁴

EXPANSION OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

The period 1937–1947 was one of the relative calm for the Cuban organized labor movement. This was due to several factors. One was the improved economic situation during much of this period. The increased demand for and improvement in the price of Cuban sugar as a result of recovery from the Great Depression and then from World War II, as well as the system of regulation of the United States sugar market, which somewhat favored Cuban producers, tended to stimulate the whole Cuban economy. Greater income from sugar stimulated other sectors of the Cuban economy, including manufacturing, commerce, and government expenditure on capital investments and other programs.

Another factor of significance insofar as the labor movement was concerned was the continuing alliance between Fulgencio Batista and the Communist Party, which largely dominated organized labor during this period. The Communists joined Batista's *Coalición Socialista Democrática*, both in the election of the 1940 constitutional assembly and in the general election for president and congress after the adoption of the new constitution, supporting the election of Batista as president in the 1940 election. Communist collaboration with Batista reached a high point when President Batista named the Communist Party president, Juan Marinello, and later Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, as "ministers without portfolio" in his cabinet.³⁵

This alliance served the Communist Party well during these years, by giving them preferred access to the Secretariat of Labor. Efrén Córdova noted "the sympathetic view of the functionaries of that ministry . . . had for Communist leaders"³⁶ and "the easy access" the Communist union leaders had "to key functionaries of the Ministry of Labor."³⁷

Thus, both the economic and political situation of the 1937–1947 period led to a very substantial increase in the membership and influence of the labor movement. The official labor history of the Castro period Communist Party noted:

In this period the organization of the masses of the workers, especially the labor unions, grew and developed without interruption and with a more accelerated rhythm than in the past. Thousands of workers who had been separated from all social and organized life decided to join together in labor unions—bank employees, those of air transport, etc.—in peasant associations, youth, feminine and black organizations.

This same source cited the period March–July 1943 as an example of this growth of the labor movement and related

organizations. In that period, forty-five new unions were established by workers in 1,134 "new centers of productions," nineteen dual unions were united, and about five thousand peasants organized and established peasant associations in forty different localities.³⁸

This growth of the labor movement was reflected in the expansion of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba. Whereas, in the CTC founding congress in 1939 there were 567 unions with 220,666 members, those numbers had increased to 595 and 410,000 by the time of the Second Congress. There were 961 unions with 406,000 members at the time of the Third Congress in 1942.

Between the third and fourth congresses of the CTC, the leadership changed the basis of calculating "membership," substituting dues payers for the rather vaguer concepts of "affiliates" or "followers." As a result, the figures for the confederation at the time of its Fourth Congress in 1944 showed a decline in membership to 163,184, although the number of unions affiliated had grown to 1,183.³⁹

In addition to increase in the number of unions and union members, the CTC organizational structure was considerably strengthened during this period. Generally, the CTC leadership sought to establish industrial unions, including within their ranks all of the workers of a particular factory or other enterprise. However, in some cases old unions organized on a craft basis persisted. This was particularly the case among the tobacco, transport and port workers. In Havana, for instance, there were still sixteen craft organizations among the port workers, eleven such tobacco unions, seven in the transport field.⁴⁰

However, in many cases wider types of unions were established. Thus, in Havana there was founded the Union of Non-Alcoholic Cafes, bringing together the workers of many such small enterprises. Generally, in the sugar industry, single unions including both agricultural workers and those in the mills, were established; all of the workers in the Polar Brewery formed a single union, and the Sindicato de Trabajadores del Petroleo de la Provincia de la Habana included the workers of the Sinclair and Shell Refineries, although those of Standard Oil maintained a separate organization.⁴¹

There was relatively little effort by employees to curb the growth and power of the labor movement by establishing organizations of their workers under employer control. Efrén Córdova wrote: "Except in some rural zones, and even there very rarely, there was little effort of employers to deal with yellow unions. The Cuban employers were not prone to organize and finance unions

under their control, and the workers were not inclined to join spurious unions or ones inspired by the boss."⁴²

However, there were a few such cases. One of these was the union in the Ariguanabo textile plant in Bauta in the province of Havana, the largest firm in the textile industry. Until 1944 it was dominated by the employer, but in that year both the Communists and the Auténticos worked successfully to destroy the firm's domination of the union, which then joined the Textile Workers Federation.⁴³

Individual unions were increasingly joined in federations. In October 1939, some sixty-eight unions of sugar workers established the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Azucareros. In 1940, the Federación Nacional de la Industria Textil y de la Aguja was formed by unions of textile and clothing workers. In that same year the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Gastronómicos united workers in the hotel and restaurant industry, and a federation was established by the musicians. In 1944, the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Telefónicos collected all of the telephone workers unions. Of course, even before establishment of the CTC there had existed the electrical and maritime workers federations, as well as Hermandad Ferroviaria, which was the federation of railroaders.

There were also regional labor federations for each province. Before the establishment of the CTC such groups had existed in four of the six provinces, and in 1940 new ones were organized in the two remaining provinces of Pinar del Río and Matanzas.⁴⁴

An important step in terms of the organization of the labor movement was the legal recognition that was finally granted to the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, the first time that a central labor organization had gained such status since the outlawing of the CNOC in March 1935. The CTC was legalized by a presidential decree on April 7, 1943.⁴⁵

Efrén Córdova noted the transformation of the labor movement's general role in Cuban society during the period under discussion:

Trade unionism evolved from a challenging posture that it had maintained in previous decades to an attitude of greater moderation, which induced it to act within the established institutional framework. In a certain sense, one could say that it effected a transformation that brought it from a generally extreme position in the social system to being an important sector of civil society, and even a power factor in the Cuban *establishment*. (Emphasis in the original)

As evidence of this new role, Córdova cited CTC participation in the price control mechanism established by the government

during World War II, the fact that President Grau San Martín addressed the Fourth Congress of the CTC, and the close relations established under both President Batista and President Grau with the Ministry of Labor. He also cited labor participation in government bodies such as the National Minimum Wage Commission and the Labor Maternity Junta. Córdova observed, "A spirit of tripartite cooperation began to appear, at least at the national level."⁴⁶

The official labor history of the Castro era Communist Party also recognized these changes in the role of organized labor:

In the new conditions and in the face of new tasks, the organization and trade union leaders were required to raise their ideological and political capacity to be able to defend in correct and firm ways, among others, the positions of the CTC in support of national unity against fascism, and in defense of the national economy. This required the collaboration of the working class with the other social classes, including their exploiters, in the common effort to defeat fascism and defend the national economy, even though this, for certain, was in the hands of the bourgeoisie and directed by it.⁴⁷

EXTENSION OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

By the early 1940s, collective bargaining and the resulting agreements became virtually the rule. As Efrén Córdova wrote, "Gradually the idea was generalized that negotiation was one of the principal functions of the union, and it should dedicate to that a good part of its human and financial resources."⁴⁸

Generally, collective bargaining was at the level of the individual firm. However, in some instances, it was conducted on an industrywide basis, particularly in the sugar industry and in the tobacco sector, where there were negotiations concerning the problem of mechanization.

Frequently, the government intervened in the collective bargaining process. Usually, government representatives were mediators or conciliators. However, in some instances, government officials served as arbitrators, handing down ultimate decisions. But in some cases, as in negotiations in the Polar Brewery, they were never called upon to intervene.

Córdova summed up the situation thus: "In most of the cases of negotiations they went forward in a relatively normal form, with accords reached in days or weeks, depending on the lengthiness of the list of demands. Particularly in middle-sized firms, where labor relations were more personal, negotiations were frequently conducted harmoniously." However, Córdova also noted that in a number of firms, particularly in the sugar industry, there was

frequent need for the government to intervene to reach—or force—agreements.

Sometimes the government felt forced to go so far as to take temporary control of firms to impose agreements. Among other cases, this happened in the Havana Electric Railway, the Coca Cola Company, Ferrocarrileros Unidos, and the Omnibus Aliados Bus Cooperative in Havana during the 1940s.

The issues dealt with in collective bargaining agreements evolved from what they had been in previous decades, when they had often dealt mainly with employer recognition of unions, and with fulfillment of terms provided for in legislation. Córdova indicated that in the 1940s agreements dealt with

the specific aspirations and needs of each firm and group of workers. The contract . . . began to have the objective of going beyond the minimum standards of legislation . . . in the 1940s . . . negotiation ceased being a matter of solving conflicts and was converted into a normal and periodic exercise with its own reason for existence. No longer was union recognition, which had caused too many strikes, discussed. Its existence accepted, there were negotiations over the facilities that would be conceded to it (headquarters, bulletin board, shop stewards' access to the administration, dues checkoff) as well as substantive questions concerning control of promotions and transfers, procedures for layoffs, creation of internal health and safety commissions, and grievance procedure. However, from the beginning of this period the largest number of sectors . . . continued giving priority to the wage question.⁴⁹

Sometimes the collective agreements reached during this period were quite extensive and covered a wide range of subjects. For instance, the 1950 contract between the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Telefónicos de Cuba and the Cuban Telephone Company was a document of 100 pages, which dealt not only with union recognition and wages and hours, but with procedures for promotion and layoffs, a grievance procedure, checkoff of union dues, conditions for receiving leaves of absence, office space for local unions and the federation, and various other issues. It was printed so that those on both sides could know its provisions.⁵⁰

By 1943, government figures indicated that there were 2,537 collective agreements in effect. That number increased to 4,152 by 1951.⁵¹

However, although regular collective bargaining became more or less the rule, this did not mean that there were no conflicts. Although, as we have noted, the policy of the CTC after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union was to prevent strikes whenever possible, some walkouts did in fact occur.

On the one hand, there were segments of the labor movement, including the printing trades, construction, and transport, in which there was still influence of anarchosyndicalists who did not accept the "class collaboration" policies of the CTC leadership. They sometimes undertook strikes such as a walkout of the Unión Nacional de Artes Graficas that closed down the major printing firms of Havana for a month.

In addition, as Efrén Córdova noted, "It was not always easy to put aside old customs and the essence of labor-management relations often led to confrontation. Wage increases, reductions of personnel, and the fulfillment of the large range of dispositions that conferred social benefits continued to be the most frequent causes of conflict."⁵²

One of the most significant strikes in this period was that of the henequen workers of Matanzas against a company that had tried to close its factory to prevent the unionization of its workers, and had reduced its workers' wages by 10 percent. According to the official labor history of the Castro period Communist Party: "The firm resistance of the workers and general mobilization in solidarity brought a favorable solution to this conflict. There were also conflicts with several textile factories, the owners of which threatened to close down their enterprises to prevent organization of their workers."⁵³

There is no doubt that during World War II and for some time thereafter, collective bargaining—whether through direct union-employer negotiations or by government intervention when direct discussions reached an impasse—generated very substantial gains for Cuban workers. The official labor history of the Castro period Communist Party sketched some of these: In the case of the sugar workers, largely because of presidential decrees, wage increases ranging from 10 percent to 20 percent were received in 1941, amounting to 57 million pesos; a general raise of 50 percent in 1942; as well as a provision for workers to receive the same wage in the "dead" season as during harvesting, were obtained. Port and maritime workers established the system of rotating employment for their members, thus eliminating favoritism by the employers. Railroaders obtained wage increases ranging from 10 percent to 20 percent in 1941, and 4-8 percent in 1943, and maintenance-of-way employees gained a minimum wage of 45 pesos a month.

The electrical workers won not only wage increases, but the reemployment of union members dismissed during the March 1935 general strike and indemnity to those same workers amounting to about 300,000 pesos. Also, between 1942 and 1944, the

tobacco workers received wage increases amounting to 10,504,202 pesos.

This same Castro era source noted: "To these successes of sectors united in federations there must be added those achieved by other groups of workers throughout the island in struggle with their respective employers. Among these were miners, henequen workers, textile workers, musicians and other sectors." It summed up the accomplishments of the unions in terms of wage increases: "In four years—1940 to 1944—the CTC and the united struggle of the workers whom it represented, under the maximum leadership of Lázaro Peña, won for the workers in industries, commerce, transport and similar activities, 264 million pesos in wage increases."⁵⁴

These gains of organized labor undoubtedly reflected a general improvement of the economic situation of the island and the levels of living of its inhabitants. Efrén Córdova noted:

The statistics of the United Nations showed that from 1945, Cuba was one of the three leading countries of Latin America in such significant indicators of modernization and development as the number of calories in the diet of the ordinary citizen, the number of periodicals, radio stations and other means of diffusion, the number of houses in relation to the population, the level of hygiene in the cities, and in educational facilities. . . . The progress registered in living conditions was not only experienced by the upper and middle classes, but also by a high percent of the working class.⁵⁵

However, Córdova also noted that there were elements of the working class who were largely unaffected, as well as rural workers who had moved to the cities in the hope of improving their lot but had been unable to find employment in the "formal" economy and had become part of a growing "informal" economy.⁵⁶

FIRST FOUR CONGRESSES OF THE CTC

We have noted the spirit of cooperation and compromise among various ideological tendencies that characterized the founding congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba in January 1939. In the next three congresses of the confederation this spirit was less evident, but the unity of the organization was maintained.

The Second Congress of the CTC met between December 12 and 16, 1940. There were 713 delegates representing some 410,000 workers. Eleven national federations were represented "as well as organizations of other sectors: metallurgy, chemical and food industries, construction, graphic arts, the petroleum

industry, the theater and related activities, various industries and agricultural workers."⁵⁷ As we have already noted, this CTC congress followed the Communist line on World War II during the period of tacit alliance of the Soviet regime with the Nazi government—proclaiming the war to be "imperialist" and insisting on Cuban neutrality in the conflict.

The Third Congress of the CTC met almost exactly two years after the preceding one, on December 9–12, 1942. There were 1,336 delegates representing 961 unions and 24 industrial, provincial, and regional federations. At that meeting, relations between the Communist trade unionists and their ideological and political opponents were particularly difficult.⁵⁸

Finally, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba held its Fourth Congress in December 1944, with 1,063 delegates present, representing virtually all of the country's local unions and trade union federations. This was the first national CTC meeting held after Fulgencio Batista had lost control of the government. His successor, Ramón Grau San Martín, addressed the opening session.⁵⁹ Relations between the Communists and their opponents were somewhat less fractious than they had been two years before, although this situation was obviously "the calm before the storm."

Efrén Córdova noted the generally moderate tone of the resolutions adopted during these first four congresses of the CTC:

It was a language that was positive and developmentalist, which was in conformity with the text of various resolutions favoring a greater institutionalization of labor relations. The Second and Fourth Congresses took particular interest in pronouncing in favor of approval of laws complementary to the Constitution; there were also references to the elaboration of a labor code and in place of advocating as in the past the unrestricted right to strike, various proposals alluded to the establishment of systems of conciliation and arbitration. . . . All the congresses also advocated the creation of social security, including insurance for infirmities not associated with work, and maternity insurance, but it was only the IV Congress that proposed an ample program of social security for all sectors, including agricultural and domestic workers.

Córdova also stressed the preoccupation of these congresses with such issues of immediate concern to the workers as unjustified dismissals from work, collective contracts, paid vacations, and the work of apprentices and women. They also dealt with economic problems arising from the war, calling for price controls, subsidies for workers adversely affected by the conflict, and the provision of adequate housing at affordable prices.

As Córdova also noted, the early CTC congresses likewise dealt with a wide range of national economic problems not directly associated with labor-management relations. These included development of electric power, promotion of the Cuban merchant marine, the creation of a central bank, and stimulation of development of manufacturing.⁶⁰

IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS WITHIN THE CTC

From its inception, of course, the CTC had within it unions and federations controlled by several different ideological tendencies. Although the Communist Party was the predominant political group within the confederation during its first eight years, and Lázaro Peña remained CTC secretary general, there were from the beginning elements more or less hostile to the Stalinists.

By the end of World War II there existed three major political factions within the CTC, and at least two less significant ones. The largest opponent of the predominant Communists were the unionists of the party headed by former President, Ramón Grau San Martín; the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico), popularly referred to as the "Auténticos." The second major non-Communist element was the group generally known as "independents," which included some old-line "reformist" leaders and newer figures who tended to be "pure and simple" trade unionists without clear political affiliations. The two groups of less significance were the anarchosyndicalists, who, as we have noted earlier, continued to have influence in a limited number of industrial sectors, and the Trotskyists, whose base of support was by the late 1940s limited largely to the eastern region and city of Guantánamo.

The Communists continued to be the dominant political element in the CTC until 1947. This dominance was undoubtedly due in part to their longstanding leadership in organizing the workers in such key fields as the sugar industry, as well as the ability of Communist-led unions (as well as others that were not under Communist control) to win substantial gains for their unions' members during the period of relative economic prosperity that started in the late 1930s. Their alliance with Batista, which after 1937 assured them of predominant influence in the Ministry of Labor, was also a major factor in assuring the Communists a dominant position in the CTC and many of its affiliated unions.

However, anti-Communist union leaders also claimed that the Communists used "gangster methods" to keep control of at least some unions. An Auténtico maritime workers leader claimed that

this was particularly true, for instance, in the case of the port workers of Havana.⁶¹

Auténtico union leaders also accused the Communists of "milking" the unions for the benefit of the Communist Party. One leading Auténtico unionist, for instance, claimed that as many as 80 percent of the members of the party were on the payrolls of unions under the party's control.⁶² The Auténtico maritime leader whom we have already cited recounted an incident in which the government issued a decree claiming an increase of the price of cigars from nine to ten cents, and when the Auténtico union leaders Francisco Aguirre, Eusebio Mujal, and Goliat himself went to see the prime minister to ask that all of the price increase be passed on to the tobacco workers, they found Lázaro Peña there before them, together with some employer representatives, to argue that the price increase not specify any set increase in workers' wages, because, Goliat claimed, an agreement had been made for the employers to pass on part of their increased income to the Communist Party.

Goliat also cited the case of the largest sugar plantations where the workers were supposed to receive 10 cents a bag of a government subsidy, but the Communist leaders of that union had agreed that the amount be reduced to 6 cents, with 2 cents going to the Communist Party, and the employers keeping the final 2 cents.⁶³

One of the principal anarchist trade union leaders made somewhat similar charges. He said that the Communists in control of the CTC spent about \$11,000 a month on salaries for their followers who held posts in the Confederación, and that the party also raised considerable funds through a kind of blackmail of employers, threatening them with attacks in the party-controlled press and from Communist-controlled unions if they did not pay something into the party's coffers. One way such payments were made was through taking "advertisements" in the Communists' radio station 1010, advertisements that in fact were never broadcast because the employers involved felt that they would be bad publicity for their firms if they were in fact put on the air.

This same anarchist leader felt that for a long time one of the advantages of the Communists was the fact that their principal rivals, the Auténticos, worked "very sporadically" against them in the unions.⁶⁴

The non-Communist factions in the labor movement were by no means united in their opposition to Stalinist control of the CTC and various unions. The most consistent opponents of the Communists were the Auténticos, whose general support in the labor movement grew substantially in the years after the founding

of the CTC. Other groups did not have consistent positions, sometimes collaborating with the Communists, sometimes with the Auténticos.

THE COMISIÓN OBRERA NACIONAL AUTÉNTICA (CON)

The Auténtico trade unionists originated in several sources. One was the Trotskyites, who in the early 1930s had controlled the Federación Obrera de La Habana, one of the principal labor groups that later cooperated in the process of labor movement unification which led to the formation of the CTC. After the downfall of the government of President Ramón Grau San Martín in January 1934, his former minister of interior, Antonio Guiteras, established his own political party, Joven Cuba, which most of the Trotskyist trade unionists soon joined. After Guiteras's murder in 1935, Joven Cuba joined the Auténticos.⁶⁵

Another element among the Auténticos trade unionists undoubtedly consisted of workers who had not previously had any particular political affiliation but were attracted by the pro-labor positions of the 1933-1934 Grau San Martín administration and who, when the deposed president established the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico) some months after his overthrow, joined the new party. Finally, the small Cuban Aprista Party also joined the Auténticos in the later 1930s.

The role of the Auténtico trade unionists, within their own party as well as within the labor movement, was formalized at the end of 1940 with the establishment of first the "workers section" and then of the Comisión Obrera Nacional (CON).⁶⁶ Efrén Córdova indicated, "The section was part of the internal structure of the party (as were the feminine section and that of youth), whereas, the commission had greater autonomy and permitted its members therefore to occasionally have discrepancies with the policy of the party and to define goals and strategies which were convenient for it."⁶⁷

The CON was headed in the beginning by Sandalio Junco, a black trade unionist who had been the founder of Cuban Trotskyism and head of the FOH. When he was assassinated late in 1942 at a meeting called to commemorate the anniversary of Antonio Guiteras's death, which the Communists had called on their supporters to prevent, he was succeeded by Eusebio Mujal, also an ex-Trotskyist. Fausto Waterman, a leading figure in the CON, claimed subsequently that the murder of Junco was part of a deliberate campaign of the Communists to liquidate the Auténtico labor leaders, citing a number of other assassinations of the

party's trade unionists that had allegedly been carried out by the Communists.⁶⁸

The CON organized a national labor congress at the end of 1942 at which Junco was memorialized. Those participating reaffirmed the nationalist and anti-Communist objectives of the CON. The congress also included various anti-imperialist pronouncements and elements of Auténtico "social doctrine."⁶⁹

One of the functions of the CON was to organize throughout the country "Auténtico fractions" in all of the unions in which the Partido Auténtico had members or followers. In this, of course, they were following the pattern long set by the Communists. Ironically, the Communists in this same period gave up—at least temporarily—the "Communist fractions" that they had long had in the trade union movement.⁷⁰

The CON made its first appearance as an organized group at the Second Congress of the CTC in December 1940. The official labor history of the Castro era Communist Party noted: "In the congress there were reflected the efforts of the Comisión Obrera Nacional of the PRC to undermine and divide the trade union movement. Eusebio Mujal, Junco and others attempted to win over, with intrigues and underhanded means a part of the delegates."⁷¹

The struggle between the Auténticos and the Communists intensified in the Third Congress of the CTC in December 1942. The Castro Communist labor history claimed:

The Mujalistas who headed the Comisión Obrera Nacional of the PRC traveled around the country, organized meetings and used their peons in the local labor commissions—in large part declassed elements—to try to impose in the assemblies of the unions the election of antiunitarian delegates. In this work, they went so far as to employ the procedure of fabricating paper unions, that is, inexistent ones, or to revive unions that had no connection with the CTC, nor registration with the Ministry of Labor.⁷²

At the Third Congress, the CON leaders refused to allow any of their people to take posts in the new Executive Committee of the CTC. When four Auténticos did so, they were thrown out of the party.⁷³

By the time of the Fourth Congress of the CTC in 1944, two months after the newly elected President Ramón Grau San Martín took office, a kind of truce was reached between the CON and the Communist leaders in the CTC. For the first time, CON trade unionists were officially elected to the leadership of the CTC, with the approval of both the Communists and the Auténticos. Four

CON members were named to the Executive Committee of the confederation (of a total of thirty-one).⁷⁴

Throughout the wartime period, the Communists in the CTC leadership tended to favor the "independents" among the non-Communist leaders, apparently seeking to use them to counterbalance the Auténticos and the CON. In 1944, for instance, nine independents were elected to the CTC Executive Committee. Efrén Córdova wrote: "During the period of the first four congresses, the Communists worked to preserve unity, giving places in the Executive Committees to the representatives of other tendencies. They succeeded always, however, in giving a larger role to the independents and reformists in detriment of the group of Junco and Mujal."⁷⁵

THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND GRAU SAN MARTÍN'S ELECTION

In 1944, the Auténtico presidential candidate, Ramón Grau San Martín, defeated the nominee backed by the outgoing President Fulgencio Batista, Carlos Saladrigas. The Communist Party continued to form part of Batista's Coalición Socialista Democrática, which, although losing the presidency, continued to have majorities in both houses of Congress. The Communists increased their vote substantially over what they had received four years before, electing four members of the Chamber of Deputies and for the first time electing three senators.⁷⁶

NOTES

1. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano 1865-1958, Tomo II, 1935-1958*, Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba anexo al Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Editoria Política, La Habana, 1985, pages 14-15.

2. Efrén Córdova, *Clase Trabajadora y Movimiento Sindical en Cuba Volumen I (1819-1959)*, Ediciones Universal, Miami, 1995, page 224.

3. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo II*, 1985, op. cit., page 26.

4. Córdova, op. cit., page 224.

5. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo II*, op. cit., pages 33-35.

6. Córdova, op. cit., page 224.

7. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc., Tomo II*, op. cit., page 42.

8. *Ibid.*, page 43.

9. Córdova, op. cit., page 228.

10. Interview with Fausto A. Waterman, a leader of Comisión Obrera

Nacional of Partido Auténtico, subsequently secretary of Youth and Sports Affairs of Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba, in Havana, August 9, 1947.

11. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 42.

12. Córdova, op. cit., page 229.

13. Ibid., pages 229; see also *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 143.

14. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 16; see also Evelio Tellería, *Los Congresos en Cuba*, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1984, pages 288-289.

15. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 28.

16. Ibid., pages 28-29.

17. Ibid., pages 36-37; see also Tellería, op. cit., pages 290-293.

18. Córdova, op. cit., page 230.

19. Interview with Fausto A. Waterman, op. cit., August 9, 1947.

20. Córdova, op. cit., page 231.

21. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., pages 49-50; see also Tellería, op. cit., pages 293-298.

22. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., pages 32-33.

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25. Córdova, op. cit., pages 233-234.

26. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 76.

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32. Ibid., page 104.

33. Ibid., page 107.

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39. Córdova, op. cit., page 265.

40. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 135.

41. Córdova, op. cit., pages 267-268.

42. Ibid., page 289.

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44. Córdova, op. cit., pages 267–268; see also *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano*, Tomo II, op. cit., pages 87–88.

45. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 129; see also Telleria, op. cit., pages 311–318.

46. Córdova, op. cit., page 278.

47. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 136.

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49. Ibid., pages 284–289.

50. *Contrato Colectivo de Trabajo Concertado Entre la Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Telefónicos de Cuba y la Cuban Telephone Company*, Havana, May 27, 1950.

51. Córdova, op. cit., page 289.

52. Ibid., page 280.

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57. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 91; see also Telleria, op. cit., pages 319–326.

58. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., pages 122–126; see also Telleria, op. cit., pages 327–336.

59. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., pages 148–149; see also Telleria, op. cit., pages 327–349.

60. Córdova, op. cit., pages 271–272.

61. Interview with Gilberto Goliat, member of Executive Committee of Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Cofino faction), subsequently secretary general of Federación Obrera Marítima, in Havana, August 10, 1947.

62. Interview with Fausto A. Waterman, op. cit., August 9, 1947.

63. Interview with Gilberto Goliat, op. cit., August 10, 1947.

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71. *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano etc.*, Tomo II, op. cit., page 92.

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